

*Der Briefwechsel des Paulinus von Nola. Kommunikation und soziale Kontakte zwischen christlichen Intellektuellen.* By SIGRID MRATSCHEK. Pp. xi+732. 16 plates. 2 maps. (Hypomnemata, 134.) Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002. ISBN 3 525 25232 3. €99(D)/€101.80(A)/SFr 154

OTHER authors write books. Dr Mratschek creates a universe. This is open even to poor readers, who can enter it through 16 illustrations (plus two maps on the inside front and back cover), which deserve a review of their own. They are strategically placed throughout the narrative (in a manner reminding of the late W. G. Sebald's 'Bildpoetik'), not merely lumped together in an appendix. The first map shows the travel routes of the messengers carrying the letters (from Paulinus's respective locations to those of his respective addressees; importantly, before Paulinus's final move to Nola the former is constantly changing, which makes many of the earlier letters incredibly difficult to trace). The second map shows Nola as the centre of an incredibly dense and intensive communication network

reaching from Scotland to the Tigris, and from inner Libya to the Baltic Sea. A first pair of illustrations (p. ix) from the *Notitia Dignitatum* and the fourteenth-century *Breviarium Nolanum* shows Paulinus as *consularis Campaniae* and as bishop. This pair also illustrates Mratschek's ambition (different from for instance C. Conybeare's in her recent *Paulinus Noster*, Oxford, 2000) not to concentrate merely on one aspect of Paulinus's life (i.e. *either* its social-political *or* its spiritual aspect), but on the two aspects combined, i.e. the senator as saint, and the saint as senator, from beginning to end. Arguably not even D. E. Trout (in his otherwise groundbreaking *Paulinus of Nola*, Berkeley, 1999) has met this challenge, for though he takes a comprehensive view of Paulinus' life and writings, the necessarily chronological structure of his biographical narrative inevitably leads him to present Paulinus as a senator and aristocrat who ends up a saint. Mratschek's work strikingly differs from that approach. The saint on the last page of her narrative (p. 602) is as much a senator *euergetes*, as the aristocrat at the beginning is a man yearning for perfection in his destiny, as a member of a proud dynasty, the *Pontii*. The third illustration (p. 114) shows their stemma, from the Antonines to the late seventh century. Such a long family history is not to be taken for granted. Aristocracy frequently wears out much more quickly, whether through ill fate or through decadence. Of course, the *Pontii* were not the only *gens* of that kind. But they were exceptional. A member like Paulinus may not have been inevitable, but he certainly became a distinct possibility, in the context of an aristocratic value system in profound transition. The images overleaf from the stemma thus duly oppose pagan and Christian concepts of man, 'earthly man', shown on an ivory diptych of the 'pagan' poet Claudian, a contemporary of Paulinus, and 'heavenly man', a mosaic in a church in sixth-century Ravenna depicting saints. These illustrations accompany Mratschek's discussion of what it must have meant for Paulinus to become an ascetic, a discussion that focuses on his inner struggle concerning the disposition of his material wealth, and on the possibilities opening up for, and the difficulties faced by, such a new life-form in a context of socio-economic and political change, as it dominated the late fourth-century Western empire. The next illustration (p. 197) is again a map. It depicts Paulinus' moves between Aquitaine and Northern Spain (*Hispania Tarraconensis*). Overleaf three further maps illustrate the administrative changes in the region in the course of the fourth century. Paulinus' wife Therasia was from Spain (p. 75–6). As a consequence the couple held possessions on

both sides of the Pyrenees. In this part of the book Mratschek the meticulous historian emerges, who discusses in intricate detail (and with much gentle, but firm, criticism of mostly less successful earlier studies) the thorny issue of the precise locations of many of these estates. Then, on p. 216, a series of photographs depicting a fourth-century villa near *Tarragona* and mosaics from *Complutum* illustrate the style in which Paulinus and Therasia may have lived in Spain, perhaps in one of the very buildings excavated on these sites. The chapter where these illustrations are to be found is entitled 'Wanderjahre' (p. 209–43), the restless period in Paulinus' and Therasia's life shortly before they finally settled down in Nola. It concludes with a list of postal contacts during that period (p. 242–3). At the following set of illustrations (p. 255) Nola has already become Paulinus' centre of communication. Interestingly, it was its remoteness, as a *secretum*, which recommended it for this purpose. We see an impressive layout and reconstructive drawings of the building complex surrounding the tomb of Saint Felix at Nola. Now Mratschek discusses 'Paulinus the "Bauherr"', the aristocratic ascetic, and ascetic aristocrat, ordering, sponsoring, and supervising large scale projects, not just churches and guest houses, but also roads, aqueducts, out-buildings, farms, vineyards, and similar enterprises. The next illustrations (p. 376) focus again on the aspect of the vast communication network, of which Nola was now becoming the centre. Among the group of mosaics in the square of the shipping companies in *Ostia antiqua* are those in front of the *statio* of the *navicularii* from *Karalis* (Cagliari) and *Gallia Narbonensis*. They date from the late second century, but they throw light on a world which was still very much alive when Paulinus wrote a petition to support a shipowner who had lost a cargo of state owned grain off Sardinia in severe winter weather and was now in danger of heavy punishment; for under pressure from the state authorities he had set sail within the proscribed winter period. This was also the world of the couriers, an epitaph of one of whom, the *cursor* Zonius of Rome, is shown overleaf. It illustrates a particularly strong section of Mratschek's work, the topic of which is the transport of letters, plus something which, in an age dominated by handwriting, belongs to the same category, namely books, and especially precious, rare, and expensive books. The last illustration (after p. 395), a map of the ancient world around the Mediterranean, shows Nola in context with other contemporary centres of communication networks, in Gaul, Northern Italy, North Africa, Asia Minor,

Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. The sections that follow deal with Paulinus' exchanges with members of those centres (by letter or through visits), members of a secular and ecclesiastical elite, or upper class, or 'High Society', as Mratschek calls it, who reproduced the old order in a new paradigm. If this study demonstrated only one thing, it would be that Paulinus was most certainly acting as a central figure in this rearrangement.

Appendices include lists of autobiographical testimonies, testimonies of contemporaries, lists of couriers ordered by social class and belonging to households, lists of correspondents with a host of prosopographical information, a chronology of visits to Rome from 395, and a translation of Galla Placidia's *epistula imperatoria* dating from March 419 summoning Paulinus to attend the Synod of Spolegium as chairman to bring to a conclusion the conflict about the succession of pope Zosimus (see p. 512–17). The volume concludes with an extensive bibliography, and an *index locorum* and *nominum et rerum*.

What remains are quibbles. Fewer doubts may be in place regarding Tacitus's Narbonensian origins (p. 22) and more, perhaps, regarding Claudian's paganism. English-speaking readers may note that Mratschek changed her view concerning the see of Memor. In *The Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001), pp. 511–53 (at p. 536) she still expresses the traditional view that Memor was the bishop of Capua. Augustine wrote him a letter in 408, which was delivered by Possidius, who was on his way to the imperial court at Ravenna. Since Memor's see is nowhere mentioned it seemed logical to assume that it was somewhere on the way from Nola, Possidius' first stop in Italy, to Ravenna; and since (for a number of reasons) it was assumed to be situated in Campania, Capua, for which no other bishop is attested for this time, seemed an obvious choice. Here, however, Mratschek (on pp. 333–4, 520–1, and 558–9) follows a more recent suggestion that Memor was his son's (Julian's) predecessor as bishop of Aeclanum. This complicates the issue of how Augustine's letter actually reached Memor; for according to Mratschek Possidius, in line with ruling practice, would have had to hand it over personally and meet Memor somewhere, be it in Capua, Beneventum, Rome, or Nola (p. 558–9). But this is fairly minor compared to the evidence in favour of Memor as bishop of Aeclanum. And Memor might well have met Possidius at one of these places. For Possidius was looking for allies to lobby the court of Ravenna to enforce the laws against paganism in North Africa. Memor was rather close to Paulinus. A year or so earlier Paulinus had composed an *epithalamium* for his son's

wedding to Titia, the daughter of bishop Aemilius of Beneventum. So Memor may have met Possidius together with Paulinus. At any rate, this is just a minute episode in the vast sea of items to be discovered in this volume.

The universe, as it were, does not open up itself easily. This volume is certainly not 'light reading'. But there are ways of getting into it. The illustrations and maps may be one of them, another one may be the prosopographical notes and the *index nominum et rerum*. For instance, while one may expect that a courier in Aquitaine might, among other ways of transport, resort to river navigation to reach his destination, it may come as a surprise that he would have had the choice of at least six different types of vessel, from speed boats (*acatia*) via river barges (*rates*) to ships of Gallic make (*nausa*) (p. 293). It remains to be said that this display of scholarship comes with the genre of the work, a 'Habilitationsschrift', which is a minor, German, version of the French *thèse d'état*, a sum of knowledge which a scholar accumulated and digested over many years. It is a universe alive in that particular scholar's mind and made (or attempted to be made) accessible to those interested. This kind of writing has its enemies, and indeed, some scholars are more successful in presenting their thoughts than others, especially when the subject matter is complex, or the amount of material abounds. But in this case the author certainly succeeded, by way of a synchronic, lexicographical, and prosopographical method, in opening up the world of Paulinus' communication and social contacts, as no one else before her has done, and at the same time provided a useful tool for further research. This book should be in every library and on the shelves of every student of patristics, late antiquity, and history, especially social history and the history of communication.

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