Judith Herrin. ***Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe*****.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020. Pp. xxxvii, 537. ISBN 9780691153438. $29.95 HB; also available as an e-book.

The latest book by veteran Byzantinist Judith Herrin, *Ravenna: Capital of Empire, Crucible of Europe,* is a study of astonishing breadth. Ostensibly a history of the northeastern Italian city, it is also at times a survey of the early medieval Mediterranean, an examination of late antique theology, and a series of vividly wrought micro-biographies of bishops and military-political figures known as exarchs. In a book of such audacious extent, a specialist reader is bound to find some arguments with which to disagree, but the overall impression is profound respect for this extraordinary achievement.

Ravenna covers approximately four centuries (ca. 390-813 AD) over the course of more than 500 pages, and such chronological range and book length practically demands a sensible organizational strategy. Fortunately, the book has that. Herrin has opted for a large number of shorter chapters: there are 37 chapters of an average of about 11 pages each, plus an unnumbered introduction and conclusion. The chapters are grouped into nine parts which present the history of Ravenna in chronological order.

Part 1, entitled "Galla Placidia," explains the choice of Ravenna as a new capital of the Western Roman Empire by Emperor Honorius and his general Stilicho and the subsequent role played by the emperor's sister, the redoubtable Galla Placidia. Chapter 5, which describes her contributions to the city, including the starry-sky ceiling of the structure known as the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, is particularly compelling (pp. 46–59). Part 2, "The Rise of the Bishops," describes the power of Bishop Neon (ca. 451-473) and also surveys the retirement of Emperor Romulus Augustulus and the rule of Odoacer over Italy.

In Part 3, "Theoderic the Goth, Arian King of Ravenna," Herrin makes an argument that the Ostrogothic king was accepted by Italo-Romans as their ruler and built a remarkably tolerant state with Ravenna as the capital. Ravenna is portrayed as a diverse, cosmopolitan city, representative of a successful union of Roman and Goth. Part 4, "Justinian I and the campaigns in North Africa and Italy," follows the history of Ravenna into the mid-sixth century. Emperor Justinian I dispatched the general Belisarius, who captured Ravenna from the Ostrogoths, restoring direct imperial Roman rule to the city. Chapter 15, on the church of San Vitale and its imperial mosaic panels of Justinian and his empress, Theodora, is particularly well done (pp. 160–173).

Part 5, "King Alboin and the Lombard conquest," describes the Lombard invasion of Italy, and the creation of the Byzantine Exarchate of Italy, with its capital at Ravenna. In Part 6, "The expansion of Islam," Herrin takes a broader view of the period to show the rise of Islam and the Arab conquests, the activities of Emperor Constans II (r. 641–668), who moved from Constantinople to Syracuse, and the Christological debates that

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resulted in the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople. Part 7, "The two reigns of Justinian II," returns the focus more directly to Ravenna itself, showing the city's growing independent streak, particularly in Ravenna's interactions with Justinian II and its defense against naval forces sent from Constantinople (pp. 292–295). Consecutive chapters focus on the power and influence of two early medieval archbishops of Ravenna, Damianus (r. 692–708) and Felix (r. 708–723).

The final two sections may be the most interesting and impactful of the book, although they chronicle the decline of the political power and importance of the city. In Part 8, "Ravenna returns to the margins," Herrin shows how the conquest of Ravenna by the Lombards ended the city's status as capital of the Byzantine Exarchate of Italy, but also allowed for increased ecclesiastical control by Archbishop Sergius (Chapter 34). In this, Ravenna's move from imperial outpost to ecclesiastically-administered city mirrored the transition of many other western medieval cities. Finally, Part 9, "Charlemagne and Ravenna," describes Charlemagne's visits to Ravenna, the impact that the monuments of Ravenna had on the Frankish emperor, and his despoliation of Ravenna to build Aachen (pp. 370–386). All of this is well done and an extremely clever way to end the book. Herrin's last sentence also sums up the argument of the book well: "The foundations of western Christendom that he [Charlemagne] exemplified were laid in Ravenna, whose rulers, exarchs and bishops, scholars, doctors, lawyers, mosaicists and traders, Roman and Goth, later Greek and Lombard, forged the first European city" (399).

A feature of the book that deserves particular praise are the occasional chapter sections that reveal Ravenna's history through its archival records. These sections all have titles that begin "Living in Ravenna," and provide small, intimate glimpses into the lives of the citizens of the city by way of preserved documents. For instance, "Living in Ravenna in the 530s" (pp. 155–156) describes papyrus records of land sales from poorer land owners to wealthier buyers. In one, dated 539, a widow named Thugilo sold land to a man named Pelegrinus. These are precious insights into daily life in Ravenna, and as I read through the book, I found myself looking forward to the "Living in Ravenna" sections. For those who might wish to track them, they are on pp. 113–115, 155–156, 180–181, 211–213, 274–275, 311–312, and 347–348. Reading all these sections in chronological order, and skipping the chapters in between, would be a different and interesting way of first approaching this book.

As mentioned above, specialists will find arguments with which to disagree. For instance, Herrin is remarkably confident that local inhabitants "accepted" or even "appreciated" the governments of Odoacer (pp. 81, 83) and of Theoderic (p. 123), but it is not at all clear that she has presented enough evidence to prove either assertion. In particular, her main source for Theoderic's popularity with Italo-Romans seems to be a couple of elites (Cassiodorus, pp. 119–120, and Ennodius, p. 138), but then again, of course we would expect elite Romans working under Theoderic to say nice things about him. Herrin also refers, on more than one occasion, to Theoderic sporting a Gothic hairstyle and moustache on the famed Senigallia medallion (p. 102, 194, and

plate 16), but Jonathan Arnold pretty conclusively proved there was nothing particularly Gothic about this facial hair in a 2013 article which Herrin does not cite.[1]

It is also worth emphasizing that, in some chapters, the book seems to become more of a general history of the early medieval Mediterranean and the focus on Ravenna is a bit lost, as in Chapter 24, "The Arab Conquests," and the first half of Chapter 31, "Leo III and the Defeat of the Arabs." Those wanting a more tightly focused history of Ravenna may find themselves doing some skipping ahead.

The author and publisher are to be praised for producing an incredibly attractive volume. It is illustrated by no fewer than 62 different images, organized into groups that are dispersed among the sections in chronological order for easy reference. Four handsome maps in the front material help to orient the reader, and a handy timeline entitled "Competing Powers in Ravenna" helps to keep straight the political, military, and ecclesiastical figures mentioned within the chapters. Finally, specialist readers may regret the absence of a bibliography in the end material.

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[1] Jonathan J. Arnold, "Theoderic's Invincible Mustache," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 6.1 (2013), 152–183.