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Tullio Spagnuolo Vigorita. *Exsecranda pernicies: delatori e fisco nell'età di Costantino*. Pubblicazioni della Facoltà Giuridica dell'Università di Napoli, 213. Naples: Casa Editrice Dott. Eugenio Jovene, 1984. Pp. 257. No price listed.

*Exsecranda pernicies*: the phrase describes *delatores* (informers) and occurs in the Codex Theodosianus 10.10.2, in a fragment of Constantine's edict of December, 312, against informers, called in the same edict the *maximum humanae vitae malum*. One of Constantine's first political accomplishments after the battle of the Milvian Bridge, the edict spoke to a chaotic and corrupt situation which professional informers had done their part to bring about. Initially stimulated by rewards under the matrimonial legislation of Augustus, such informers had steadily gained power under his successors, who were generally more afraid of disloyalty than of the dangerous abuses to which the encouragement of informers could clearly lead. Acting decisively against informers was, as Spagnuolo Vigorita persuasively argues in this lucid and

well documented book, an important step on Constantine's part toward fighting corruption and at the same time strengthening his political position by pacifying possible senatorial hostility after his victory over Maxentius.

Spagnuolo Vigorita argues that Constantine's edict of 312 and a later one of January, 313, were directed chiefly against fiscal informers, not against accusers bringing charges of other kinds (adultery, homicide, magic, etc.) or against slanderers. Scholars have long pondered the exact meaning of *delator* in Constantine's edicts. Spagnuolo Vigorita's exhaustive examination of the evidence now throws significant light on the question. The fiscal informers whom Constantine threatened with death in the edicts had been, Spagnuolo Vigorita points out, a major threat both to the land-holding senatorial aristocracy and also to the upper levels of the imperial bureaucracy, whose acquisition of property brought them into conflict with the fiscal interests of the state. It was primarily to tranquilize the concerns of these powerful groups that Constantine promulgated his edicts.

In the second half of the book, the author puts Constantine's edicts into historical perspective by reviewing the manner in which the matrimonial legislation of Augustus gave rise to the professional *delator* and led inevitably to the situation addressed by the edicts. Although the intent to increase the treasury apparently underlay Augustus' legislation only indirectly, and although some of Augustus' successors (among others, Titus, Domitian, at the beginning of his reign, Nerva, and Trajan) sought to bring informers under control, by the Severan age the *delatores* had become legitimized as an important means of increasing revenue and of satisfying imperial avarice, direct forerunners of Constantine's *exsecranda perniciēs*.

Amherst College  
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ELIZABETH LYDING WILL