

ASPECTS OF ROME

C. EDWARDS, G. WOOLF (edd.): *Rome the Cosmopolis*. Pp. xvi + 249, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Cased, £45/US\$60. ISBN: 0-521-80005-6.

Like the volume under discussion, this review starts in the Colosseum. In 1855, Richard Deakin, a botanist, compiled a *Flora of the Colosseum* consisting of 420 species of plants, some of them so exceptional that they could only have arrived in Rome on the bodies of animals supplied for the spectacles from the outlying regions of the empire. This case could be added to the many examples in the contributions for *Rome the Cosmopolis*, illustrating implicitly the centrality of the city of Rome for her empire, geographically, politically, and mentally.

This centrality makes Rome a fascinating object of research, 'a good stage on which to deploy arguments about imperial culture and religion, about the economics and epidemics of the Roman world, about the visual and textual fabric of imperial Roman life (and much else)' (p. 18). The nine contributors to this book—papers are by the editors Catharine Edwards and Greg Woolf, and furthermore by Mary Beard, Jaś Elsner, Willem Jongman, Richard Miles, Neville Morley, Walter Scheidel, and Caroline Vout—have all looked at different aspects of Rome as a world city. They have been supervised by, or worked closely together with, Keith Hopkins, to whom this book is a tribute. Fortunately, the volume appeared in time for Hopkins to receive it before his premature death. His influence is clear throughout. It is evident in the implicit 'So what?' of E. & W.'s introduction (pp. 1–20) and in Elsner's reminiscences about Hopkins lamenting: 'Why have you not seduced me? I want to be seduced by your prose, not bored by it!' (p. 99 n. 90). Likewise, in the continuous emphasis on modern comparisons and economic models—most noticeably in Jongman's paper on demography and the population of Rome (pp. 100–22) and Scheidel's wonderful exploration of 'Germs for Rome' (pp. 158–76). Finally, Hopkins's example looms large for Neville Morley, who chooses to analyse 'Migration and the Metropolis' through the unorthodox mode of a film script (pp. 147–57).

Added to these are papers on art in Rome (Edwards, Elsner, Vout), a long-awaited and perceptive article on the triumph by Beard (pp. 21–43), and fascinating contributions on the creation of Rome as cultural capital in literature (Woolf) or through the creation of an 'alternative' such as Carthage (Miles). The book makes for interesting and often enchanting reading, but does it lead to an image of Rome the Cosmopolis? It does, regularly. Edwards's emphasis on Rome's 'second population'; the endless statues through which Rome, more than any other city, 'captured the conquered in stone' (p. 68) invokes all sort of new images of Rome as an extraordinary city. Scheidel's analysis of the various diseases that would flourish especially in an ancient metropolis like Rome emphasizes a part of Rome's history that is little explored, but integral to the life (and death) in the city: 'The ultimate consumer city in history, Rome set new standards in wasting lives as much as in largesse and monumental splendour' (p. 176). However, some articles, though not without interest, tell us little about Rome as a world city. Elsner's evocative study of early Christian art in Rome uses the city as a background, but it is much more about the art than it is about the city. Similarly, Vout's 'Embracing Egypt' (pp. 177–202) tries to 'carefully insert Egypt inside Rome's boundaries' (p. 202). She is, of course, right that questioning the incorporation of something 'so patently Egyptian' (p. 180) into a Roman frame may disclose a lot about the functioning of Rome as the centre of

an empire, but, like Elsner's piece, the article says less about Rome than it does about the subject under direct discussion. These, however, are only minor points of criticism.

More serious are some crucial omissions. Surely, a paper on the topography of Rome was called for. With *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* and Hasselberger's *Mapping Augustan Rome* (JRA Supplement 50) complete, the importance of Rome's layout has been made abundantly clear. Such a paper would furthermore have been able to tie together several other contributions in which Rome's topography is an important background factor. Linked to this is the surprising absence of a paper on actual politics in the city of Rome. Though the rôle of popular politics in Rome, both in Republic and Empire, has been prominent in recent debates, it is all but ignored in this volume (illustrated, for instance, by the absence of references to Fergus Millar in the bibliography). Finally, emphasis on topography would have unveiled perhaps the most serious weakness of this volume as a full discussion of Rome the Cosmopolis: a lack of attention to the periphery. Only La Regina's *Suburbium* volumes will place Steinby's *LTUR* in proper context. Likewise, Rome the Cosmopolis was defined by her surroundings, wider indeed than the area directly beyond her walls. With so much attention on the city itself, at least one piece on her hinterland would have provided crucial context.

These criticisms, as said, follow from looking at the book as a full discussion of Rome the Cosmopolis. This, however, would be unfair on the editors. The volume is, after all, essentially a Festschrift, and the fact that one can even have suggestions on how *Rome the Cosmopolis* would have provided more insights into the subject, shows how coherent E. & W. have managed to keep potentially widely divergent contributions. A general index and collective bibliography make the book easy to use. As a contribution to our conceptions of Rome, and even the centrality of Rome in her empire, *Rome the Cosmopolis* promises more than it delivers. But that should not detract from the immense value of many of the contributions, or the simple pleasure of reading it. It is a seductive book.

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ROMAN COMMUNICATIONS

A. KOLB: *Transport und Nachrichtentransfer im Römischen Reich*. Pp. 380. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000. Cased. ISBN: 3-05-003584-6.

Efficient transport and communication are vital not only to trade and commerce, but to imperial government. The larger and more complex the empire, the more important these factors become. Communication was a principal factor in the increasing centralization of Roman imperial government. We know from Suetonius (*Aug.* 49.3) that Augustus instituted the imperial postal service, which came to be known as the *cursus publicus* in the late third century A.D., modeling it on its Persian predecessor (Hdt. 8.98) and on the Ptolemaic postal service (details of which are preserved on a papyrus from Hibeh, P. Hib. I 110; 259–253 B.C.). There is much evidence for the postal service preserved on inscriptions and papyri, and in literary texts and the legal codes. It has attracted attention, especially from German scholars, approaching the topic from both an epigraphic and legal angle. Despite this, the *cursus publicus* is a muddle in modern works, not least because of the many changes