

Eckhard Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, *Imperium Romanum: Geschichte der römischen Provinzen. Beck'sche Reihe; 2467. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2009. Pp. 128. ISBN 9783406562679. €7.90 (pb).*

Reviewed by Danielle Slootjes, Radboud University Nijmegen (d.slootjes@let.ru.nl)

The emergence, functioning, decline, and fall of great empires such as that of Rome have fascinated modern scholarship for decades, even centuries. Although much scholarly attention has been given to questions on the 'decline and fall' of the Roman Empire (note the astonishing list of 201 reasons for the fall of the Empire on the final page of Alexander Demandt's *Der Fall Roms*, written in 1984), nowadays there seems to be more appreciation of and concentration on the remarkable longevity of the empire. The book under review, *Imperium Romanum. Geschichte der römischen Provinzen* by Eckhard Meyer-Zwiffelhofer, adopts this latter scholarly approach, one that searches for explanations on why and how the empire was able to exist as long as it did. *Imperium Romanum* is part of the series *C.H. Beck Wissen*, for which publisher Beck asked specialists in many different fields to present their views on large important themes and phenomena within the fields of cultural studies and natural sciences to a broad non-specialist audience.

In *Imperium Romanum* Meyer-Zwiffelhofer offers his audience the story of the Roman empire's growth and processes of operation, with a particular emphasis on how the provincial territories functioned within the empire as a whole. In his first chapter he deals with the emergence of Rome as an empire. As *caput Italiae* Rome evolved into the *caput orbis* with its characteristic *pax romana*. Roman military supremacy played a crucial role in the process of Rome's transformation from a city-state into an empire dominating the entire Mediterranean. As was to become clear, Rome stood at the beginning of an enormous expansion by which she was to control the entire Mediterranean.

Chapter two presents a short history of the Roman empire. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer not only describes the political developments in the Roman empire from Republic through late antiquity, he also explains several key concepts such as *imperium* or *provincia* which are of vital importance for our understanding of the functioning of the empire. Inevitably in a book that deals with the longevity of the Roman empire, Roman expansion needs to be addressed more closely. Even though this book is meant for a broad audience, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer weaves glimpses of the historiography of several topics into his discussions. In the case of Roman expansion, for instance, he explains why he opposes earlier views in modern scholarship on expansion that argue that the Romans were able to expand mainly because they never gave up. Furthermore, as he claims, there is no evidence for other often heard motives of Roman expansion, such that of the Senate intentionally pursuing an imperial strategy of expansion, or economic motives. Rather, he argues (in subsequent chapters) for a broader mixture of reasons for Rome's territorial growth. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer deserves a compliment for his concise description of the history of the Roman empire in this chapter.

As he illustrates in chapter three, the Empire's durability has much to do with the way it was governed. Several features of the empire stand out. Both in imperial times and in late

antiquity, when one takes into consideration its enormous territory, the empire was protected by a relatively small military force (respectively ca. 350,000 and 550,000 men). A similar point can be made for the strikingly small number of imperial officials responsible for central and provincial government in the empire. With such a relatively small military force and number of imperial officials, it was important for Rome to develop a strategy by which to rule its empire. To be sure, it is much easier to obtain provincial territories than to maintain them (cf. Florus 2.30.29). As is generally understood, local support was absolutely necessary for the functioning of the empire. The reward of Roman citizenship and individual treaties with cities helped to ensure that local cooperation, although one needs to acknowledge that a certain level of independence remained a key feature of local communities in the empire as well. Furthermore, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer calls attention to the differences between the eastern and western halves of the empire that existed before the territories became part of the empire and continued to play a role throughout the history of the empire. In ruling her empire, Rome had to be flexible in regard to the different roles she had to play as ruler. In some instances, using violence and absolute power was needed to control the territories and its peoples, whereas in most situations benevolence and munificence seemed more productive (Cf. Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty*, 2000). Meyer-Zwiffelhofer emphasizes the significance of provincial initiatives in the process of an increasing influence of 'Romanness' within provincial communities (72), whereby he seems to position himself with those who argue for a more bottom-up view in the romanization debate.

Chapter four concentrates on loyalty and resistance. Remarkably, once the inhabitants of the areas that Rome had acquired had accepted Rome's rule (willingly or not) they appear not to have considered Rome as a center of suppression but eventually even to have felt part of a *communis patria* represented by Rome (80). With regard to resistance, as Meyer-Zwiffelhofer rightly points out, one needs to make a distinction between the opposition one would expect in a period of expansion and opposition during periods of consolidation. In addition, it turns out that resistance mostly aimed at corruption or behavior of certain internal groups, and not very often against 'Rome'.

The Roman government used several instruments in its attempt to achieve unity and harmony within its empire. Not only cooperative local city councils, but also provincial councils supported and created a network of loyalty throughout the empire. Furthermore, for inhabitants of the empire in general the imperial cult offered an opportunity to honor their ruler, but also, for cities and especially their elites, an opportunity for self-representation. Similarly, the gift of Roman citizenship (at least up to A.D. 212) and the patronage system (cf. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital) gave a sense of unity to the empire. In this chapter Meyer-Zwiffelhofer takes up again the discussion of the modern concept of romanization. Whereas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries modern scholars mostly believed that romanization stood for a process set in motion by Rome, now we tend to acknowledge more the active role of the provincial population as well ('self-romanization'). The latter does not mean mere acceptance of the Roman way of life. A certain level of (cultural) resistance is also part of this process as local identities survived and continued to flourish. Usage of local language and writing systems is indicative for the survival of local identities. Certainly, Rome never forced Latin, the official language of communication for the Roman government, on its subjects throughout the empire.

Meyer-Zwiffelhofer's final chapter offers some concluding remarks on the *imperium Romanum* in comparison to other empires. Contrary to many other empires Rome fully incorporated its provincial periphery into the center of its empire, particularly after the

constitutio Antoniniana of A.D. 212. Surely, even though from that moment onwards almost all free inhabitants of the empire were Roman citizens, the difference between *humiliores* and *honestiores* came to play an important role differentiating between citizens. Nevertheless, in principle, all were Romans and equally part of the Roman empire. As Meyer-Zwiffelhofer argues (118ff.), full incorporation of all the inhabitants was possible only in a monarchical system, as the inhabitants were all in the same sense subject to and dependent on the emperor who functioned as *patronus maximus* to all of them. During the Republic the situation had been quite different, as the Senate in cooperation with the *populus Romanus* had had an exceptional and superior position within the empire in comparison to the subjects of the empire. In the end, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer recognizes that in understanding the secret to the success of the empire we also have to take into account that the 'actors' on the political stage experienced favorable conditions which they knew how to bend for their own purposes and successes.

As was said earlier, this book is intended for a non-specialist audience (including students) that reads German. For such an audience the inclusion of four maps presenting the Roman empire at different stages in its history is helpful. Furthermore, at the end of the book there is a section with suggestions for further reading and a time-table. In sum, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer presents a concise and compelling history of the provinces of the Roman Empire in which scholarly discussions on many topics are effectively woven into a well-composed narrative.