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Katell Berthelot (ed.), *Reconsidering Roman Power: Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian Perceptions and Reactions*, (*Collection de l'École française de Rome* – 564), École Française de Rome, Rome 2020, pp. 527 + b/w ills.; ISSN 0223-5099; ISBN 978-2-7283-1408-9

Contemporary historians of the Roman Empire have frequently sought to explain why this multiethnic and multicultural state endured and thrived for as long as it had. Rome remained the dominant player in the ancient Mediterranean until the 3rd century CE, its power undermined neither by its ongoing internal turmoil nor its multiple violent coups d'état. The Empire owed its stability to its efficient administration, military power and, significantly, nuanced domestic policies, with Roman emperors employing a gamut of measures to keep their subjects content. Although we have a relatively thorough understanding of Roman administration, we still know little about relations between the imperial administration and various ethnic and religious groups that made up the Empire.

A group of scholars congregated at the École française de Rome (May 10–12, 2017) to take part in a conference devoted to studying Roman social and religious policies in the imperial provinces. The international conference, a capstone of the European Research Council grant ("Judaism and Rome," principal investigator: Katell Berthelot), included twenty papers that were later issued as its proceedings, with seventeen contributions in English and three in French.

The volume divides into five thematic blocks. The first section: "Rome and Previous Empires: *translatio imperii* and Comparative Perspectives," focuses on Greek and Jewish texts reflecting on Rome's place among empires of the ancient world (F. Russo, "Rome as the Last Universal Empire in the Ideological Discourse of the 2nd century BCE," pp. 21–36; N. Sharon, "Rome and the Four-empires Scheme in Pre-Rabbinic Jewish Literature," pp. 37–60; H. Inglebert, "Compare Rome, Alexandre et Babylone: la question de l'exceptionnalité de l'empire de Rome aux IV^{e}–VI^{e} siècles," pp. 61–82). The contributions consider the strand of Greek historiography that recast the political history of the known world as the succession of four great empires. In the eyes of the Greeks, the four empires were those of the Assyrians, Medes, Persians and Macedonians. Nevertheless, resounding Roman victories over the Macedonians and Antiochus III induced several Greek historians of the 2nd century BCE to designate Rome as the fifth empire. The four empire tradition also appears in the Jewish tradition: unlike the Greeks, Jewish writers did not add to the four empires but included Rome among their number. The author of the *Book of Daniel* pioneered the notion of Rome as the fourth empire (cf. Dan 7: 23–26; 8: 23–25), with subsequent Jewish authors engaging with this idea

in their theologized writings. Those who lived under the Roman rule in Judea believed that Rome's decline and fall, seen as inevitable due to the cyclical nature of history, would herald a new and better chapter for the Jewish people. Some Christian writers expressed a similar interest in Rome's historic significance, drawing parallels between empires of Rome, Babylon and Alexander the Great. In contrast to Jewish writers, the said Christian historians eventually began to reappraise Rome's role, producing more nuanced interpretations.

The second section of the volume: "The Dynamics of Power," encompassses six chapters whose authors employ diverse types of historical sources to examine how the Roman administration used propaganda, ideology and religion to manage and appease conquered peoples (G. Wolf, "The Rulers Rule," pp. 85–100; O. M. van Nijf, "Experiencing Roman power at Greek Contests: *Romaia* in the Greek Festival Network," pp. 101–125; E. Rosso Caponio, "Personnifications de Rome et du pouvoir romain en Asie Mineure: quelques exemples," pp. 127–155; C. Barron, "The (lost) Arch of Titus: the Visibility and Prominence of Victory in Flavian Rome," pp. 157–177; M. Lavan, "Devastation: the Destruction of Populations and Human Landscapes and the Roman Imperial Project," pp. 179–205; E. DePalma Digeser, "Apollo, Christ, and Mithras: Constantine in Gallia Belgica," pp. 207–225). Some contributions draw our attention to the complexity of relations between Rome and local communities, fostered by common interests of the Roman administration and indigenous elites. At times, the newly installed Roman power benefitted from previous gestures of goodwill towards Rome made in the Hellenistic era. When Roman armies interfered in the local affairs on behalf of the people, grateful communities honored Roman commanders with civic or religious distinctions and held games in honor of goddess Roma.

The third section, entitled "Reflections on the Limitations of Roman Power and Its Weaknesses," somewhat misleads the reader, since only two chapters out of four discuss the ancient treatises focusing on perceived weaknesses of Roman power (J. Dubouloz, "Gouverner l'empire, se gouverner soi-même: reflections sur la notion de *maiestas* dans la literature de la République et du Principat," pp. 229–254; J. J. Price, "Structural Weaknesses in Rome's Power? Greek Historians' Views on Roman *stasis*," pp. 255–267). The analyzed ancient authors cite abuses of clerical power in the provinces under the Republic (disgracing Rome's *maiestas*) and the turmoil of civil wars and rebellions endemic in the late Republic and Principate eras. Two other chapters consider attitudes to Roman power in ancient theological treatises. K. Berthelot ("Power and Piety: Roman and Jewish Perspectives," pp. 269–289) examines Jewish opinions on Roman piety, its significance to the imperial power and its relation to Jewish piety: intriguingly, certain Jewish authors expressed a belief that Rome's dominion depended on Jewish prayers. In turn, Eusebius of Caesarea, the author of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, saw the ascendance of Rome as an act of divine providence, with the destruction of Jerusalem paving the way for the spread of Chrisitianity within the Empire (S. Morlet, "Ce que peut l'Empire: les caractéristiques et les limites du pouvoir romain d'après *l'Histoire ecclésiastique* d'Eusèbe de Césarée," pp. 291–307).

The fourth section ("Criticism of Roman Power") encompasses three chapters on methods and styles of criticizing the Roman power employed by Greco-Roman, Jewish and Syrian writers. One common mode of disparagement involved comparing

Rome and its emperors to negative stereotypes linked to wild animals or imaginary beasts, a practice jointly used by Greek, Latin, Jewish and Christian writers (M. Roux, "Animalizing the Romans: the use of Animal Metaphors by Ancient Authors to criticize Roman Power or Its Agents," pp. pp. 311–335). The choice of animals and their negative traits depended on an author's provenance, aims and religion. Y. Wiland ("Alexander the Great in the Jerusalem Talmud and Genesis Rabbah: a Critique of Roman Power, Greed and Cruelty," pp. 337–360) demonstrates that negative depictions of Alexander the Great in Rabbinic literature encoded the critique of Roman rule and its abuses. In turn, N. Andradae ("Romans and Iranians. Experiences of Imperial Governance in Roman Mespotamia," pp. 361–384) examines Syriac texts by the 3rd-century Chrisitian authors based in Edessa, the capital of Oshroene. Andradae's analysis of *The Book of the Laws of the Countries* and *Acts of the Apostle Thomas* gauges local opinions on the Roman and Parthian administrations and offers an argument for a specific dating of the latter work. The scholar stresses that the analyzed Edessan literature (authored by Christians) praises Rome and denigrates Parthia because the former empire tended to treat Christians more sympathetically.

The fifth and final section ("The Impact of Roman Power upon Judaism") scrutinizes Jewish perspectives on the Roman administration. Two chapters investigate Jewish religious resistance to Rome found in written works. S. Schwartz ("The Mishnah and the Limits of Roman Power," pp. 387–415) designates the Mishnah as the seminal work of resistance, abandoning both the form and style of Greco-Roman literary tradition in search of authentically Jewish modes of socio-religious remembrance through literature. In turn, N. B. Dohrmann ("Jewish Books and Roman Readers: Censorship, authorship, and the Rabbinic Library," pp. 417–441) considers the tannaitic literature as a tool of intellectual and religious resistance under the Roman occupation. Its anonymous creators consciously fashioned an exclusive collection of religious writings: they rejected non-Jewish and some Jewish authors, meticulously avoided allusions to and engagement with non-Jewish and unorthodox Jewish literature (such as the non-Scriptural tradition) and restricted access to the tannaitic works. This introverted approach led to creation of a barrier dividing the Jewish and Roman worlds. Subsequently, C. Hayes ("Roman Power through Rabbinic Eyes: Tragedy or Comedy?, pp. 443–471) examines difficulties experienced by rabbis writing historical accounts, who frequently labored to reconcile their belief in nurturing divine providence with the brutal reality of the Roman occupation. Finally, M. Vinzent's article ("'Christianity': a Response to Roman-Jewish Conflict," pp. 473–491) claims that it was the conflict between Rome and the Jews that made Christians self-define as the successors of the Jewish tradition. The author traces the first positive textual reference to Christianity (an aspirational religious identity) to Marcion's *Antitheses* (140s CE), in contrast to earlier negative references of Christianity as a deprecating exonym (1 Peter 4:16).

This concise review cannot mention all intriguing and occasionally groundbreaking insights found within the proceedings. One must first praise the sheer span and depth of approaches adopted in conference papers. The consideration of a gamut of attitudes and beliefs of local peoples toward the Roman administration, especially those surviving in the Jewish sources, captures the intricacy of relations between the imperial power and its provincial substratum. Divergent conclusions drawn by volume contributors

add to the value of the collection and inspire readers to investigate in detail practices of Roman imperial administration, varied local attitudes towards Rome and practices of cooperation and resistance in specific milieus. Certainly, the collection may serve as a valuable introductory reading on these matters, both for historians of Rome and scholars of the Jewish tradition.

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