

For Syme and Nicolet, the passage of Suetonius about substantive military tribunes chosen by popular vote was sufficient explanation (*Aug.* 46). But D'Arms unpersuasively downgraded this to a nominal rank (191).

One of the book's theses is maintaining close parallelism between equites and senators. Unlike some, D. follows Alföldy's adventurous view that senatorial posts generally carried salaries, like those of equestrian procurators. But that seems to conflict with the blueprint in the Dio/Maecenas speech, where senators are salaried if governors, in order to reimburse them for foreign service, whereas procurators receive salaries as a general compensation for being poorer than senators. There is no sign of salaries in the case of Gavius Clarus, an indigent senator who nevertheless saved enough to be quaestor and aedile, but depended for the expenses of the praetorship on an Imperial loan, which he repaid in due course (Fronto, ed. van den Hout, 127–8).

Despite the potency of the equestrian prefects, 'senator' meant 'grand seigneur' in a way that 'eques' never could. If a well-respected senator could no longer afford the princely lifestyle to which members of his class were accustomed, the Emperor might respond with a cash grant of staggering size. Appointing equestrians to special positions alongside senators reflected not so much parity between the two orders (as D. is inclined to suggest) as flexibility in one case, and inflexibility in the other. The senatorial career was embedded in powerful rules and protocols which the Emperor infringed at his peril, whereas procurators (like Domitius Marsianus, whose thoughtful advice from Marcus Aurelius we can still read) were his personal servants, and could effectively be sent wherever he chose. 'For all practical purposes it did not matter whether an office-holder was an eques or a senator since they were all appointed by imperial favour' (369). But this allows too little for the senatorial elections and proconsular ballots whose workings Pliny documents, even if the Emperor had powers of override. The typical lifestyles could be drastically different, with the result that ordinary equites, with no residence requirement unless jurors, and spared the expenses of a grand house in the capital, were far more likely to seek local glory by serving as magistrates or priests at home.

D.'s coverage of the main equestrian topics is assiduous and efficient. The later mutations of equestrian rank and its enlargement into something more powerful are closely examined in the final chapters. Perhaps more might have been said about the municipal activities of equites, and their recurrent role as *curatores rei publicae*. From the many careers in Italy and the West, we see that towns with an equestrian curator tended to be middle-ranking places, which stood below those where a senator was in charge, but above those in municipal hands (F. Jacques, *Le privilège de liberté* (1984), ch. 3). The activities of equites as jurors and businessmen might also have been discussed further, though detailed evidence is mostly lacking.

In general, the narrative is fluent, proficient and carefully documented over an enormous chronological span. As one example among many, D. is particularly good at tracing areas of *ad hoc* overlap between senatorial and equestrian authority, with his full lists in ch. 11 of senators acting for equites, and vice versa. His book marks an important advance. It has the very welcome bonus of a large dossier of photographs, showing both funerary monuments and statue-bases of equites. Many of the inscriptions are reproduced in full in the text as well as being translated.

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LUKAS DE BLOIS, *IMAGE AND REALITY OF ROMAN IMPERIAL POWER IN THE THIRD CENTURY AD: THE IMPACT OF WAR* (Routledge monographs in classical studies). London/New York: Routledge, 2019. Pp. x + 312, maps. ISBN 97808153737. £115.00.

EMMA DENCH, *EMPIRE AND POLITICAL CULTURES IN THE ROMAN WORLD* (Key themes in ancient history). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xiv + 207, illus., map. ISBN 978052100910. £19.99.

Imperial power was subject to change. The nature of this power, its shape, and the impact of change upon empire are concerns addressed by both Lukas de Blois and Emma Dench, albeit from different perspectives. *Image and Reality of Roman Imperial Power*, the product of B.'s extensive

research on third-century Roman imperial history, offers a detailed examination of the nature of imperial power over the period A.D. 193–284, notably in terms of both the erosion but also adaptation and refashioning of such power, framed within the overarching impact of war in the period. D.'s *Empire and Political Cultures in the Roman World*, on the other hand, tackles the broad spectrum of Republic and Empire, together with provincial cultures to assess the 'local experience of change attendant on empire' (1).

B., while acknowledging the diversity in social and ethnic groups (2), places emphasis on the interconnectivity of empire as opposed to explicitly foregrounding regionalisation. The study articulates clearly the impact of war and other forms of violence through a region-by-region analysis (140–54), examining regional specificities in relation to war zones, hinterlands and local structures of taxes, supply requisitions and liturgy. Nevertheless, the overall conclusions on the escalation of problems as regards the impact of war on the economic and fiscal sources of power stress that there was 'no regionality of crisis' (153). The empire is presented as a delicately balanced system of power-relations not only between the emperor, centralised administration, and local structures, but also between different regions and neighbouring areas. While different regions experienced the locally specific consequences of wars both external and internal, they also suffered and adapted to 'a spreading and shifting of burdens' (24) as part of the imperial system.

The foundation for B.'s analysis of impact is a substantial chapter surveying the wars of 193–284 (ch. 2), which provides the most up-to-date survey of the period. The subsequent chapters examine thematically the different sources of imperial power, based on Michael Mann's *Sources of Social Power* (Vol. 1, 1986): economic (ch. 3), military and political (ch. 4) and ideological (ch. 5). Throughout, B. provides the reader with a survey of scholarship and draws on a vast range of sources acknowledging the diversity of regional necessities and local responses. The repetition of certain case-studies serves to illustrate the interconnectivity of the different sources of power, although this does lead to frequent reduplication of information in the endnotes.

The sources of social power required propagation and communication throughout the system. This representation of power is 'a process through which people construct the world around them; it presupposes rituals and adaptive ways of looking' (11). As B. paints it, we have a picture of political imperial power as a monopoly of violence (Max Weber's theory of state power) and authority in order to procure the necessary finances to manage the empire, which B. terms 'an extraction-coercion cycle' (12). The administration of the empire was reliant on fiscal, military and administrative networks at imperial, regional and local levels, but also on its subjects accepting the legitimacy of power. In his chapter on 'Ideological sources of Roman imperial power' (ch. 5), B. convincingly articulates the use of imperial presentation to train people in what to expect of imperial power, acting as 'a school of ideology' and that '[i]n this way representation and perception of imperial power were mutually reinforcing processes' (229). Over the course of chs 3–5, B. presents a clear evaluation of both the sources of power as actual reality and the representation of power, demonstrating their interconnectivity within the imperial system.

B.'s overarching thesis considers whether the changes which the Roman imperial system underwent as consequences of the wars of the third century undermined or in fact strengthened imperial authority. He coherently charts the decline in productive capacity, eroding economic and fiscal power, which had a potentially negative impact on military power, but also stresses the positive reaction in the form of Gallienus' reforms and new mobile army. These both strengthened the military source of power and developed new administrative structures, effective for military and logistical needs, and the promotion of equestrian career paths. Whilst this 'bureaucratisation' of imperial power was demonstrably fit-for-purpose, creating a more integrated, homogeneous administrative apparatus and providing new forms of social mobility, it also weakened the relationship between the emperor and the *urbs*, and opened up space for estrangement of the senators. This adaptation to the crisis of the third quarter of the century was ultimately not sufficient to correct serious areas of erosion to economic, fiscal and military power, as the continued usurpations demonstrate. Indeed, B. frames usurpations as, in part, military groups and leaders placing a heavy demand on supplies, which suffered continuous problems due to the economic erosion of the period.

On an ideological front, B. persuasively demonstrates the potency of perceived values and expectations: even when, or indeed perhaps because, in actuality the sources of imperial power were eroding, there nonetheless continued to be an emphasis on maintaining imperial representations of military victory and dynastic stability, and more generally on impressing upon audiences the fiduciary nature of the coinage. Ultimately, it would seem, the desire or need to

maintain such representations of power contributed to the erosion of ideological power, for rulers were unable to ‘find an effective new ideological foundation for their power’ (259).

A striking argument that comes from the examination of impact at the local level and edges of empire is an insistence on a perhaps unexpected outcome of the loss of an imperial monopoly of violence in localised contexts. Power relations shifted as communities invested in self-help and militia initiatives against invading forces. For B., this is evidence of a greater integration into the Roman imperial system: local communities act in defence of the system, providing testimony to an increased sense of loyalty, and not (just) to a loss of imperial monopoly of power. Certainly, in borderlands and war zones, the blending of local militia and imperial forces demonstrate the necessity of local networks and structures for the maintenance of imperial power.

The identification of loyalty to the Roman empire, particularly at the edges, is something that D. strongly cautions against in her essay. More specifically, D. is reacting to what she terms the ‘conversion model’ (13, 157) of the twentieth century, which sought to perform a ‘totalizing shift’ in the process of ‘becoming Roman’. D. argues that instead we should rather focus on the ‘ongoing processes of conceptualizing, enacting and claiming modes of power’ (17) and consider local experiences, purposes and alternative *loci* of power. As the title implies, plurality is an important framework for D.’s compact but wide-encompassing scope. This is not to deny a consensus or acknowledgement as to the efficacy of Roman power for numerous peoples and groups within their own particular contexts of performance, but this does not, as D. repeatedly stresses, ‘necessarily entail loyalty to Rome’.

Empire and Political Cultures is a part of CUP’s Key Themes in Ancient History series, and as such it provides an accessible and lively engagement for understanding the interaction and impact of Roman power on local articulations of ‘political identity and self-direction’ (16), from the early third century B.C. to the high empire of the second and third centuries A.D. Because of the emphasis on plurality and competing systems, D. stresses the study is open to ‘fuzziness’ and that the essay has ‘no pretension of comprehensiveness’ (17). She stresses the importance of processes, that frame her discussion in which she frequently talks of ‘reproduction’, ‘translation’, ‘naturalization’, ‘localization’, and ‘internalization’. Over the course of some 160 pages, D. provides the reader with both a broad overview of ‘the thinly stretched nature of Roman power’ and specific engagements in the processes of empire ‘at its edges and in times of crisis’ (157). The work is structured so as first critically to evaluate modern scholarly debate and engagement with the impact of the Roman empire on cultures and communities. In the introduction, D. cogently surveys the shifts in thinking from Haverfield’s *Romanization of Roman Britain* (1905) to Woolf’s *Becoming Roman* (1998) and Ando’s *Imperial Ideology* (2000): the shift from a belief in generalised homogeneity and loyalty to Rome, through the possibility of asymmetric and multiple relations at the intersection of ritual and practices within the empire to complex processes of a shared value system or consensus on Roman power. Out of this survey, D. highlights the singularity of the process, the issues of conversion or co-option into the system, which offers little space to explore the ‘alternative or more immediate systems and *loci* of power’ (156) observable at the intersection of the imperial and the local.

D. frames her study with an examination of a ‘Roman Dialect of Empire’ (ch. 1) that seeks to explore the dynamic, ongoing processes involved in the translation of Roman power from the wider context of the negotiation of diverse ideas of the forms of imperial power in the Mediterranean world to the spectacle of power and the ‘habitation of subjects to particular expectations and opportunities’ (30) — a similar concept to B.’s ‘school of ideology’. The following four chapters explore thematically various means by which communities, peoplehoods and grouphoods experienced and articulated power within the Roman world: ‘Territory’ (ch. 2), ‘Wealth and Society’ (ch. 3), ‘Force and Violence’ (ch. 4) and ‘Time’ (ch. 5). Over these chapters, D. provides a whistle-stop tour across the chronological and geographical breadth of the Roman world, providing an immensely succinct and articulate journey through the multi-faceted diverse ways in which Roman power was ‘felt and enacted to different degrees in different ways across place and time’ (57). Whilst there may be the inevitable fleeting references which will elude the intended audience (and note the erroneous dating of the La Turbie monument to 17 rather than 7 B.C.: 113), D.’s handling of the breadth of sources covering multiple languages and media is masterful, shedding light on the multiple ways in which Roman power was reproduced for specific, personal and local reasons.

As promised (16), D. certainly achieves a bridge between republican and imperial governance and the shape of imperial power, and between imperial governance and provincial cultures. As a result,

D. persuasively and convincingly shapes a flexible and dynamic diagnostic for her readers to break from the 'conversion' model and to allow the value of Roman power within a complex, competing system. Local consent to Roman power, in the many forms it might take, may not necessarily indicate loyalty or 'Romanness' in any explicit form, but should rather be seen as placing the political currency of Roman symbols and articulations of power within the broader scope of complex Mediterranean identities.

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JOHN F. DRINKWATER, *NERO: EMPEROR AND COURT*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp. xviii + 449, illus., maps, plans. ISBN 9781108472647. £32.99.

There has been no shortage of books on Nero. 'Nero has attracted significant attention', as John Drinkwater notes with typical understatement in his impressive, convincing, but occasionally frustrating evaluation of Nero's reign (10). At over 400 pages, with great attention to detail, this book challenges M. Griffin, *Nero. The End of a Dynasty* (1984) as the obvious English starting point for Neronian events and politics. For a comprehensive analysis of the Pisonian conspiracy (197–219 with table 2), a good overview of what we know of the Golden House (248–63), or a detailed description of Neronian finances, imperial avenues of income and fiscal management (326–68), this is now the book to consult first. Yet D. aims to do more than that. He wants to show how Nero was neither mad nor bad, nor a divine autocrat. D. argues forcefully that there was a 'wider team behind a single *princeps*' (59) and that this 'Establishment' successfully ran the Empire. Nero had no clear idea about what role to play. He first acted the *princeps*, but although he was capable, he 'grew bored with the details of administration' (129). Nero therefore increasingly detached himself from responsibilities, taking up 'acting the sportsman and artist' (293). This was fine as long as the Establishment could solve problems without him, but when in 68 Nero needed to 'play' the general, he refused to do so (407), and was dropped by the Establishment. Nero was 'never in charge of the Empire' (416). Others were, and did a good job, explaining why so much went well in Neronian times.

This reconstruction may be correct, and D. suggests sensible scenarios for how matters played out. He does so through 'considered inconsistency': sources are accepted or rejected 'on the grounds of plausibility' (13). This often works well, certainly in the first chapters (Part I: Background, 7–168). D. sets out problems in Neronian historiography, argues convincingly that Nero never placed the status of senators in doubt (26), and describes in detail the people who would surround Nero throughout his reign: his mother (32–55) and then 'the Establishment Team' (56–80). In the course of his argument, D. debunks some persistent myths. His Neronian court, against V. Rudich's court in *Political Dissidence under Nero* (1993), was a place 'where people were not afraid to air at least some of their opinions' (116), and Neronian times were 'the opposite of an age of suffocating repression' (128). At a military level good commanders were appointed, who were given a relatively free reign, even if 'grasp of the wider political and military situation appears to have been weak' (152).

In other parts of the book, 'considered inconsistency' works less well, especially in the chapters brought together as Part II: Assessment. Surely D. is right that Nero was not the murderous monster of our literary sources, and his chapters analysing prominent deaths in Nero's reign are very good on the detail (169–232). But responsibility for the death of Agrippina is too easily shifted away from Nero on the grounds of plausibility (183–7). Where, in other cases, killing is undeniable, it was 'due to political necessity and managed by the Establishment' (232). Why, moreover, does D. accept Suetonius' claim (*Ner.* 56) that Nero urinated on the image of Dea Syria (266 and 287), other than that it fits his argument against eastern influences on the emperor? And how is Nero's declaration 'that he was at last beginning to be housed like a human being' (Suet., *Ner.* 31.2) 'conclusive proof' that there was no divine connotation to the Golden House and hence no Neronian interest in 'divine status' (272)? Simply wrong is the claim that the reliefs from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias are 'official statuary' (39). As to Nero's presumed madness, D. chooses