

## BOOK REVIEW

*A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome*. Edited by ANDREW ZISSOS. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016. Pp. xxi + 602. Hardcover, \$195.00. ISBN 9781444336009.

This Wiley Blackwell companion undertakes an analytical investigation of the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the Flavian age of imperial Rome.<sup>1</sup> The volume applies an approach of two-way interpretive attention: it examines the Flavian period as a temporal well-defined political and cultural whole, simultaneously focusing on its complexity and diversity. The basis for the demonstrability of this complexity is provided by the exceptional circumstance that this short period of the history of Rome is unusually well documented from the civil sphere to the state government, from the lower classes to the elite, and from the popular to high culture. The aim of the volume is to answer the question of what is Flavian about Flavian Rome.

*A Companion to the Flavian Age of Imperial Rome (CFAIR)* opens with an Introduction by Andrew Zissos, a summary of all the theoretical premises that organise the studies into a single volume. The introduction is followed by six larger thematic parts, further followed by four appendices, a glossary and two indices.

“Part I. (Preliminary)” consists of a single study in which Frédéric Hurlet offers a panoramic overview of the significant literary, epigraphic, and numismatic sources of the period, primarily in the context of imperial power.

The four studies opening “Part II. (Dynasty)” give an overview of the history of the Flavian dynasty proceeding from its rise to its fall. This, however, is not event

<sup>1</sup>The first handbook published on the Flavian age focuses on giving a critical review and re-evaluation of the culture of the period: A. J. Boyle, William J. Dominik (edd.), *Flavian Rome. Culture, Image, Text*. Brill, Leiden–Boston, 2003.

history—that would be an unnecessary undertaking given the brilliant monographic analyses by M. Barbara Levick<sup>2</sup>, W. Brian Jones<sup>3</sup> and Miriam Griffin<sup>4</sup>. Here, attention is focused, above all, on the process, the characters and events as driving forces behind it.

The next three studies present the image (*imago*) of the Flavians in both senses of the word. Steven Tuck's analysis provides a picture of what kind of political and ideological slogans and values were promoted by the imperial propaganda which, as a whole, also functioned as the dynasty's self-presentation. The following two studies provide the visual representation of the ideology, i.e. the representation of the by now united power of the Empire and the Flavians on artifacts as well as the Flavians' monumental building projects.

Lóránd Dészpa places the political aspect in focus again. He marks out two consecutive stages of Flavian *status quo*: the time of the expansion of power (*propagatio imperii*) and the period of peace constructed from an entire network of social events and practices.

"Part III. (Empire)" discusses the economic and administrative functioning and operation of the Roman Empire. The studies focus on the issues of center and periphery. In order to review these, the analyst's horizon widens in space, along the following topics: organization of the empire's border protection and development of its infrastructure; the person of the emperor, who is beginning to act as a rival to Rome, the center of the empire; and a deep analysis of two provinces: Judea in the east and Britain in the west.

The twelfth study in this part deserves special merit due to its original research method. Randall Pogorzelski investigates the issue of center and periphery as a primarily cultural aspect based on the literary texts of the period. He addresses the heterogeneity of the Romanization of the peripheries and also mentions an empire with several centers, exemplified by Vespasian's long stay in Alexandria.

The seven studies of "Part IV. (Societies and Cultures)" gives an analysis of the society of the Flavian age as well as its Roman and non-Roman culture according to diverse points of view. Examination of the concept of foreignness in the period sheds light on how it was primarily in cosmopolitan Rome that foreignness

<sup>2</sup> M. Barbara Levick, *Vespasian*. London–New York, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> W. Brian Jones, *The Emperor Titus*. New York–Sydney, 1984; *Ibid.*, *The Emperor Domitian*. London–New York 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Miriam Griffin, *The Flavians*, in: Alan K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, Dominic Rathbone, *The Cambridge Ancient History XI: The High Empire*<sup>2</sup>. Cambridge, 2000, 1–83.

and integration became balanced. The appearance of “foreigners” from the provinces, above, all, from Spain and Gallia among the aristocracy of the Flavian age is a manifestation of the process which soon reaches the institution of emperorship—first in Trajan’s rise to power, who was of Hispanic origin.

The gender based examination of contemporary Roman society makes this transition visible, too. Women of the Flavian age began to acquire greater and greater economic and existential autonomy for themselves. Not independently from this, the same took place in the public sphere.

Yun Lee Too draws attention to the difference between the Roman and the Greek elites’ educational practices. Eleanor Winsor Leach shows the town structure, public and residential buildings of Pompeii in the Flavian period focusing on the rebuilding following the earthquake of 62 AD

Sarah H. Blake’s excellent study makes an attempt at uncovering the aesthetics of everyday life based on still lives from Campania and literary descriptions of similar themes. The pictures and texts overall reveal the abundance that characterized the whole of the Empire provided by the Emperor for his subjects.

Helen Lovatt examines *Liber spectaculorum* by Martial, the description of triumph in *Bellum Iudaicum* by Josephus and the imaginary world of the spectacles described in the three epic texts of the Flavian age. In her conclusion she draws attention to a particular duality manifest in the *spectaculum*-discourse of the period.

The emperor’s role as patron was a phenomenon known from the time of Augustus. However, as Antony Augoustakis points out, Domitian’s intensive culture-forming activity shows more continuity with the time of Nero. The period’s vibrant literary life and a book trade that required numerous copies are thought to have been the factors that brought copyright and plagiarism to the fore at this time.

“Part V. (Literature)” discusses the rich literary legacy of the period, but not from a poetic aspect, instead, in the context of the historical, social, and ideological processes of the Flavian age. Neil W. Bernstein gives a reading of the period’s epic poetry as texts that reflect on recent historical processes. The anthologies by Martial and *Silvae* by Statius represent occasional poetry, but William J. Dominik widens the interpreter’s horizon when he reviews the poems from the aspect of contemporary Roman social life, values, and attitudes.

Paul Roche’s comparative analysis of the prefaces to *Naturalis historia* by Elder Pliny and *Institutio Oratoria* by Quintilian adds further nuances to the patron relationship between poet and emperor discussed in Part IV.

In the chapter reviewing the Greek literature of the Flavian Age Adam Kemezis addresses fundamental issues of imperial Greek literature as a whole. The basic question is: can we speak about Greek literature in the Flavian age at all with such a scarce corpus of texts that can be safely dated to this period?

The subject of study of the last chapter are those Latin and Greek literary works lost to us whose existence, content and contemporary evaluation are saved in the surviving texts.

In his three studies of “Part VI. (Reception)” Andrew Zissos gives an overall picture of how the culture of the Flavian age, also significant from the aspect of impact history, was regarded, understood and interpreted in centuries to come. The author dedicates a separate chapter to showing how inspiring the unearthing of Pompeii in the 19th century was for arts and what a rich literature it created.

Andrew Zissos did excellent work not only as an author but also as an editor. The main merit of CFAIR is that it does not follow the schematic method of large summary volumes. What it offers is not a superficial summary of information and evaluations mechanically reviewing the period’s history, economy, and culture. It does not allow its own views to be shaped by the framework imposed by the period’s history, textual and artifactual references, instead, it makes its own new analytical approaches shape the period. Combining the best traditions of classical studies and the aspects and methods offered by literary and cultural theories, this companion probes deep into and revives the period of Rome’s history that can be simultaneously interpreted as a continuation of the Augustan age, an independent period, and the precursor of the following 100 years or so.

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