

BOOK REVIEW

Imperial Rome a.d. 193 to 284: The Critical Century. By Clifford Ando. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012. Pp. xiv + 256. Hardcover, \$45.00. ISBN 978-0-7486-2051-7.

The third century ad is a difficult period for historians and lovers of history alike to understand. On the one hand, historians contend simultaneously with an embarrassment of riches in documentary source material (e.g. Decius' edict on sacrifice, "without doubt the single best-attested event in the third century and quite possibly one of the best-attested actions of government in all of antiquity" (120)) and with patchy and conflicting literary sources, ones that often defy easy categorization or interpretation (e.g. the *Historia Augusta*). The importance of contemporary sources beyond the bounds of the empire (and beyond those of Latin and Greek) also complicates historians' work.

On the other hand, non-specialist readers are liable to get bogged down in the minutiae of the seemingly endless succession of emperors who spend their time on the stage more often in walk-on bit parts than as the purple-clad sovereigns they aspired to be. Also, the magnitude and multitude of crises inexorably shivers modern narratives into disparate chunks, just as the Roman *imperium* experienced fragmentation into regional states, e.g. the Gallo-Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Palmyra.

But it is imperative for anyone interested in the ancient world to understand the third century ad because between 193 and 284, the period covered by Ando's new entry in the *Edinburgh History of Ancient Rome*, the Roman Empire experienced fundamental changes in its government and society. Ando's book aims to explain these changes in a way that will give both historians and non-specialist readers a framework to understand just what happened during this tumultuous century, why it happened, and how it set the groundwork for many subsequent developments (and problems) in the Roman Empire.

Readers looking for a blow-by-blow account of the political and military turmoil of the age may be a little disappointed, but Ando is not interested in such a straightforward and myopic narrative. As he states in the Introduction, he is

trying to manage a narrative on two tracks simultaneously, politics and political culture, whose chronologies proceed at different paces. Ando does provide the reader with four maps (xii–xiv), a list of emperors and usurpers (230–2), and a concise chronological table (233–8), and these will help ground the reader as he alternates between chapters on political history (2, 3, 5, 7, 9) and ones on cultural and governmental history (4, 6, 8). Of these two sets the latter is of special value.

The heart of the book, and in this reviewer's mind the most valuable part, is Chapter 4, "Law, Citizenship, and the Antonine revolution." In this chapter Ando discusses the many implications of the Antonine Constitution of 212 that granted Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Roman Empire. Apart from the widespread adoption of the *nomen* Aurelius by the new citizens, Ando argues that this one act, ostensibly a thanksgiving to the gods for Caracalla's miraculous "survival" of an alleged plot by his brother Geta, fundamentally shifted the relationship between the government and the individual on many levels.

Legally, the act made the free inhabitants of the empire technically homogenous in their legal status, and, as he shows, this effected not a wholesale replacement of local law (*ius civile*) by Roman/international law (*ius gentium*) but both a gradual accommodation by locals to the Roman legal code and procedures and a more ready acknowledgement of *mos regionis* by the government. Scholars less well versed in Roman law, like this reviewer, will find Ando's explication of the legal sources and principles involved very useful.

Religiously, the act allowed the central government to reach more deeply into the lives of its subjects than ever before. In Chapter 6, Ando shows how this set the stage for the more invasive and prescriptive measures taken during the Decian and Valerian "persecutions" when emperors sought to enforce communal piety towards the gods and communal support for their own tenuous position through a public display of *religio*.

On a governmental level, the act increased the role of the central government in the lives of its provincial subjects, not merely because as new Roman citizens, they became more familiar with (and more adept at manipulating) the procedural working of Roman law and bureaucracy, but also because this increased the scope of governmentality (a term Ando explains in Chapter 8) on the citizen-body. Subjects began to identify themselves more and more as stakeholders in Roman government. This, as Ando argues using many examples, is why even traumatic events like the breaking of the Empire effectively into thirds during the reign of Gallienus, the advance of the Juthungi to Rome, and massive defeats by Sapor on the Eastern front did not disrupt local government practices

completely. This also explains how the reintegration of these regions and the restoration of the authority of the central government across the empire under Aurelian went more smoothly than one might imagine.

I found very few, and minor, errors in the book: e.g. Aureolus is misspelled on p. 231. I would have liked for Ando to comment on the revolt of the slaves of the imperial mint at Rome under Felicissimus and its connection to Aurelian's monetary measures, but given the scope and intent of the book, its absence is easy to forgive. In any case, Ando's "Guide to further reading" (239–41) points the way for readers to pursue the many strands of inquiry to which this book serves as an excellent introduction.

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