

BOOK REVIEW

Banishment in the Later Roman Empire, 284—476 CE. By DANIEL A. WASHBURN. Routledge Studies in Ancient History. New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Pp .ix +239. Hardcover, \$140.00 ISBN 978-0-415-52925-9; ebook, \$112.00 ISBN13: 978-0-203-10556-6.

Exile and banishment are useful tools in the hands of the politically powerful against the politically weak. In an era in which a single authority ruled over a large part of the known world, banishment and compulsory exile from a victim's homeland were frequent phenomena (nineteenth century Britain, both republican and imperial Rome). In our era of passports, national citizenship and travel visas, such enforced displacement is more difficult to accomplish, and yet today vast migrations occur of the often terrified victims of military conflict (Syria, Ukraine), and also the purposeful movement over national borders of those seeking a better economic future (South Americans to the USA, central Africans to South Africa).

Washburn's meticulously-researched and closely-argued book is concerned with the first kind of exile only: banishment by a Roman authority, in the third to fifth centuries mostly by the emperor, of Roman citizens who had incurred that authority's displeasure. Washburn explains in his Introduction (1–15) that the purpose of his book is 'to create a general matrix for understanding the institution itself' (1), which was fraught with 'dizzying complexities' (9). His sources are a series of legal and ecclesiastical documents (with the latter preponderating), listed as 'Primary Sources' (209–215), also more briefly listed as 'Abbreviations' (161–162).

The problem is that sources are usually either theoretical and prescriptive or merely cite instances of the practice of banishment. Yet from documents ranging from the *Codex Justinianus* to the acts of various ecclesiastical councils and the writings of various Christian and secular authors, Washburn has deduced generalizations from a host of case studies that carefully bolster each separate part of his argument. Since there is more ecclesiastical material available than secular, the case studies tend toward the former, but the author intends his work to draw a generalized picture of the issues involved.

These issues are covered in seven chapters, each divided under sub-headings, totaling some thirty-five or so sections in all. Individual references are cited, often with further elucidation, in a series of rigorous annotations (collected as copious, closely-printed end-notes in a small font, 54 lines to a page, 163–207).

Chapter One, “Varieties and Commonalities” (16–40) starts with an exposition of the often-indiscriminately used key terms *deportatio*, *relegatio* and *ex(s)ilium*. Of these, the first tended to be permanent and included loss of citizenship, the second implied the retention of property and rights and the third was often a blanket term encompassing all variants, but sometimes with implications of its own. An exile’s social standing both affected and was affected by the type of punishment imposed. Banishment involved ‘a subtle mix of chastisement, humiliation, propaganda and spectacle’ often serving to enhance the reputation of the punisher (35–38). Yet such coercion was often regarded as restrained, as it was eminently reversible.

In “Banishment and the Church” (41–64) Washburn shows that religious conflict was often resolved by the banishment of a bishop by a secular authority, intent upon imposing good order. Citing instances of religious banishment in the republican era, Washburn argues that native Romans accepted as natural the connection between ‘excessive religious behaviours’ and ejection from the state. In the later imperial era such banishment would restore order, serving to “convert” the banished and bring him back into the orthodox fold, thereby “exterminat[ing] schism and heresy” (50). It would also protect the faithful from the contagion, even ‘pollution’, brought by aberrant thinkers. Interestingly, deported clergy suffered less (material) loss than the laity, as they could take up new connections and regain lost status in a new environment.

The third chapter, “The Authorities” (65–81) examines a variety of officials who could, like the emperor, exercise the right to banish. In the era in question these typically were the governors of provinces or ‘vicars’ who would oversee a group of provinces, also lower ranked magistrates, in ‘a thicket of later Roman bureaucracy’ (68), even bishops (as an alternative to excommunication). There was room for abuse, but mostly these powers were used to protect the faithful in a particular area.

According to Washburn’s next chapter, “The Enforcers” (82–97), decrees of banishment were not always carried out, or were sometimes defied. Where they were, ‘extraction’ of the victim usually allowed him time to prepare. If the victim was a popular bishop, he would often willingly leave in secret, at dead of night, lest

REVIEW OF Washburn, *Banishment in the Later Roman Empire*

his parishioners try to 'rescue' him and tumult should ensue. Such attempts did not, however, always occur. Civil or military officials could accompany the banished, often treating their quasi-captives well, but those exiles who were free to travel needed no supervision. Often locals were employed to prevent their (punishable) unauthorized return.

Chapter Five, "The Banished" (98–125) shows exiles as not so much victims as survivors who had escaped more severe punishment. Laws give an indication of the types of crime punishable by exile; yet socio-legal complexities cannot in all cases be unraveled. "Life-altering, but not life-ending, punishment" (101) could be meted out to criminals found guilty of murder, forgery, extortion, embezzlement, adultery, *vel sim*, but also for harboring a fugitive or not reporting a parricide and other cases of dereliction of duty. Initially only an 'upper-class' punishment, exile became a means of keeping order, even of effecting "Roman social engineering" (110).

Banishment of a slave was an effective punishment for his owner. High officials, even governors (or their staff), political rivals or religious dissidents, even women, could be punished.

Chapter Six shows that "Life in Banishment" (126–143) was not always harsh, especially for prelates. Yet locations were mostly undesirably remote, with southern Egypt representing the ultimate punishment (135). In time islands became less popular as punishment. Mostly the 'hardship' encountered was political impotence and boredom, which were, however, preferable to the danger of barbarian incursions over frozen rivers. Inconsistency of communication was a major disadvantage.

But exile needed not be permanent, as the last chapter, "Return of the Exile" (144–160), shows. Recall and restoration could be the result of political change at Rome, but also of *indulgentia* (both "pardon" and "kindness"), turning the returnee into a "walking advertisement" for an emperor's clemency (149). Return was frequently achieved through the intercession of a powerful friend in the Roman tradition of patronage, or through popular demand, but also after a change of regime (or of the political atmosphere) and later also at set Christian festivals. Even non-Christians would rely on the intercessory abilities of bishops. Thus the "disciplinary circuit" (160) was completed and an exile returned.

Washburn's excellent scholarship is sometimes marred by avoidable minor typographical errors.¹ These few blemishes aside, Washburn's thorough monograph makes a valuable contribution to modern scholarship on exile. An eleven-page bibliography of 'secondary sources' (215-26) and twelve pages of a double columned Index (227-239) complete the book.

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¹ Examples are: '... rather *that* to an official ...' (9); '... purpose may have been *to* less to retaliate...' (33); '... he made *regularly* decisions on whom to eject ...' (66); '... the authority behind the banishment Zeno ...' (78). More seriously, on 78 there is a common solecism: Washburn uses '*begs*' for '*invites* the question'. ('Begging the question' is an idiosyncratic term for fallaciously assuming the conclusion of an argument). Similarly, use of the *transitive* verb '*infringing*' for the *intransitive* '*encroaching*' before the preposition '*upon*' (118) is a common but avoidable error.