

ricordo della grande Roma, leggendario o storico che fosse, non venne mai sepolto, anzi esso continuò a essere frequentemente sentito e anche risuscitato per poi manifestarsi sotto forme e tipologie sempre nuove.

I curatori del volume possono giustamente congratularsi con se stessi per l'esito altamente positivo dell'impresa. Tutti gli oggetti scelti per la mostra servono ottimamente a documentare gli elementi salienti della trasformazione storica della città pagana in quella cristiana. Il prezzo del libro è piuttosto alto ma acquistarlo mi pare un buon investimento a lungo termine.

*Mika Kajava*

EDWARD CHAMPLIN: *Nero*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2003. ISBN 0-674-01192-9. 346 pp. EUR 39,50.

Controversial even in his lifetime, Nero's image has evolved over the generations but generally towards the worse. There has been little effort, or even desire, among scholars to reinterpret the sources handed down to us. In this book, the effort is made. Champlin, in his own words, is not out to justify Nero's actions or rehabilitate his character. He is, however, offering an explanation, a context, for some of Nero's alleged crimes and tries to make some sense of the peculiar and hideous acts of the emperor.

The main sources for Neronian history are Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio. All of them are generally considered to be extremely hostile towards the emperor. The historian Tacitus once argued that to know politics is to know those who have the power. By this he meant the Caesars. In his *Annals* Tacitus claimed to have known the true Nero. The great scholar Ronald Syme accepted Tacitus's view. In his *Tacitus* (1958), he decided to trust the picture of the main sources and said that the portrayal of Nero corresponds in large measure with the facts. Many scholars before and after him have repeated this evaluation. Though research concerning Neronian history has suffered tremendously from the lack of sources positive to the emperor, there were such accounts, as Champlin reminds us. The need for this kind of re-evaluation of Nero is therefore obvious but the task is not an easy one. In fact, some say it is impossible.

Champlin admits that it is difficult to get behind the sources. He avoids the problem by accepting much of the information concerning Nero's crimes. Then, scene by scene, he tries to create a more rational context, a more understandable background to Nero's often odd decisions. Champlin's aim is to explain rather than judge and, for that purpose, he has assumed that Nero's deeds were controlled, at least to some extent, by sense and rationality. Now this is a rather different approach to the emperor who is said to have been a total lunatic without greater vision. Yet for Champlin Nero's controlled deeds are just another justified perspective on Nero and quite rightly. The truth lies usually somewhere between various explanations when it comes to controversial historical figures and Neronian reality is more complex than the sources would have us believe.

The book starts with Nero's death AD 68. The first chapter is one of the most interesting ones in the book for it deals with Nero's popular image among later

generations. It also simultaneously creates an undeniable historical background for a more positive understanding and study of Nero. Although sources tell us that there were few who mourned emperor's death, they were certainly understating the truth. The emperor was indeed heavily missed by the people and this nostalgia for Nero went on for centuries, into the Middle Ages. It is precisely this posthumous fame of Nero that intrigues Champlin. Nero's afterlife, not so much stressed in other scholarly studies, was certainly unique in antiquity and matches, in some respect, that of Alexander the Great. Both of them were rumoured to be alive somewhere or expected to rise again one day. Their deaths were rejected by many people and this raises serious questions when it comes to Nero. How can such a monster be missed?

Champlin is not trying to make a good emperor out of a bad one. The question he is asking is simply how Nero might be perceived as good although he did commit the crimes, not by posterity but by the Roman people themselves, the authentic audience, who actually lived under the reign of Nero. This is the central idea of the book. With this objective, there is no need to reject the basic information of Nero being a tyrant and a big obstacle in the study of Nero is avoided. The answer to the key issues lie in Champlin's opinions somewhere between Nero's own artistic passions and in the way the Roman society comprehended myth and interacted with the ruler. To put it simply, Nero used the mythological past to justify his actions. Legendary genealogies had linked upper class Romans to gods and heroes and the presence of myth in society was prominent. Nero grasped this and used it in creating his own vision of reality.

This is an interesting suggestion. No one can deny the omnipresence of the legendary past in Roman society or the way emperors before and after Nero manipulated it. Nero was the Caesar who chose singing, acting and charioteering over administrative duties. But was there a conscious scheme on his part behind his actions which linked past and present, and resonated, as Champlin asserts, with contemporary social attitudes? It seems to me a rather too convenient explanation. Over the years, I have noticed that there is a tendency towards explaining Nero's peculiarities with other peculiarities when we are lost in the jungle of hostile testimonies. However Champlin's vision is worth considering. Nero was an artist in his peculiarities.

To emphasize his claims, Champlin has chosen the most outrageous misdeeds of Nero. Matricide and the burning of Rome are the crimes which echoed for centuries afterwards in popular folktales. For me one particularly interesting detail arises. In the case of the arson, Champlin, rather surprisingly, accepts what so many before him have rejected as biased information from hostile witnesses: the popular rumour of Nero as the arsonist. For Nero to have burned the city down in order to fulfill his dreams of Neropolis would have been, in a way, the most heinous act of the emperor and certainly a question which can never be answered. In the case of Nero however there must be a diversity of approaches if we want to get behind the hostile evidence and give Nero a fair trial.

The book is an intriguing contribution to the study of interrelations between reality and myth. It also presents a different view of Nero. It is not provocative in that sense that it would give us a whole new Nero, but the attempt is made to shed light on some of Nero's odder actions. Champlin himself is convinced that Nero's misdeeds were not irrational or bizarre. The reason for Nero's considerable posthumous popularity is

simply that tyranny can have a certain popular appeal. Nero is portrayed in this book as a calculating, intelligent man who had a vision and who was constantly watching audience's reactions. He knew what he was doing and to convince others (in other words to stay alive after his monstrous deeds) he combined two things: his abilities on the stage as a performer and the power of myth in Roman society. Nero's longing for fame and fortune went so far that he mythologized his enormities. Talking about undying passion for the arts!

*Marianne Ojanaho*

*Prosopographia militiarum equestrium quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum. Pars sexta. Laterculi alarum – cohortium – legionum.* Scripsit HUBERTUS DEVIJVER†. Ediderunt SEGOLENA DEMOUGIN et MARIA THERESA RAEPSAET-CHARLIER. Symbolae Facultatis Litterarum Lovaniensis. Series A/Vol. 3. Universitaire Pers Leuven, Leuven 2001. ISBN 90-5867-162-3. 231 pp. EUR 45.

These *laterculi* are meant to round off the *magnum opus* of Hubert Devijver, the *Prosopographia militiarum equestrium* of which five volumes were published during the author's lifetime, the last being *Supplementum II*, published in 1994. Devijver died, prematurely, in 1997, at which time (as one learns from the Introduction furnished by the editors Demougin and Raepsaet-Charlier) he had started to write a third supplement meant to cover the years 1993–1998. However, "nihil aliud quam suscipere potuit tertium *Supplementum*" (p. v). On the other other hand, he had had the time to finish a manuscript of the *laterculi*, published in this volume. The editors say that, in preparing the manuscript for publication, their task was "formare, indices et tabulam abbreviationum componere" (p. vii). The editors must be thanked for having done all this, for, as a result of their labours, this remarkably useful (and physically handsome) volume is now at the disposal of scholars.

Whereas the *Prosopographia militiarum equestrium* (*PME*) consists of articles on individual equestrian officers, the *laterculi* published in this volume are meant to furnish information on the commanders of the individual military formations, *alae*, *cohortes* and legions being dealt with. Thus, under *ala I Flavia Singularium* (p. 32f.), one finds all the known *praefecti* of this particular *ala*. The *alae* and *cohortes* are presented in alphabetical order (the legions according to their numbering), the key word being the main name of the unit (*Singularium* in this case, *Siliana* in the case of the *ala* which precedes, etc.). As there is often some variation in the names of units, it must be noted that these lists are useful not only for those who wish to find information on the officers of a particular unit, but also for those who simply need information on the identification of auxiliary units; for instance, those having to deal with (e.g.) a certain *ala Tauriana* will find, under the letter T on p. 35, that the full name of this unit was in fact *ala I Flavia Gallorum Tauriana c(ivium) R(omanorum) torquata victrix* (the officers of which are listed on p. 17 under G). Under each heading, the officers are listed in alphabetical order, a chronological order being excluded as many of the officers cannot be exactly dated. – The volume is rounded off by indices of persons and places.