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CRISIS OR TRANSFORMATION?

Klaus-Peter Johne (Hrsg.): *Die Zeit der Soldatenkaiser. Krise und Transformation des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr. (235-284)*. Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2008. Volumes 1-2, pp. 1409.

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The title of the publication presently under review^{*1} designates as its topic the era of soldier Emperors² while its subtitle defines therewith what the book means by this designation, namely the half century that falls between 235 and 284, that is the fall of the Severan Dynasty and the ascendance of Diocletian, in other words, the beginning of the age of tetrarchy. The monumental two-volume work makes an attempt at presenting this period, wishing to offer the reader a multi-faceted comprehensive picture of it based on the findings of scholarship in the past few decades.

Nevertheless, the central problem in the volumes emerges as early as the subtitle: can these decades be further regarded as a period of full-scale imperial crisis or is it more practical to interpret and characterize them rather as a stage of transformation or a period of transitional nature. This formerly relatively little studied half-century period³ of Roman History used to be traditionally regarded as one characterized mainly by military anarchy and a general crisis

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¹ All further references in the footnotes to the reviewed opus will henceforth be *Soldatenkaiser*.

² This designation (and its antecedents) had occurred in the classical authors. It was first used in modern times by J. Burckhardt, only to be generally used from F. Altheim onwards. In greater detail on this, see: *Soldatenkaiser*, 6.

³ The study of the period in question is rendered difficult by the limited number and fragmental nature of relevant written (mainly historiographical) sources. Moreover, this period of the 3rd century vanished for a long time from the focus of research as a transitional period between the early Empire and the late Imperial period. On the historiography of the period see in greater detail: *Soldatenkaiser*, 125-157.

permeating all spheres of life in the whole Empire.⁴ Studies in recent years⁵ have, however modified this earlier scholarly position – thus one can today form a more complex, more balanced and more detailed picture of the subject. But, a synthesis of the new findings has long been missing, that is, a comprehensive presentation with a uniform approach based on new research on the stormy middle section of the 3rd century is what the opus hereby reviewed has taken upon itself.

Such a monumental job as the comprehensive discussion of the era of soldier emperors extending not only to political history, both domestic and external policy matters but also economic and intellectual life, social history, as well as religious conditions, moreover extending to the presentation of territories adjacent to the borders of the Roman Empire does now exceed one man's faculties. The editor, K.-P. Johne, therefore enlisted the help of a whole range of acknowledged researchers so that they summarize the available knowledge from rather remote topical fields by exploiting the latest professional literature while also helping further research and orientation by offering comprehensive notations. More than two dozen researchers participated in this project including not only well-known classical historians of the Roman Empire, but also experts on the ancient Near East, numismatists, linguists and philologists, senior and junior scholars alike. Coordination of work, and securing the uniform framework of the book and its logical structure was undertaken by the editors, K.-P. Johne and his colleagues U. Hartmann and Th. Gerhardt.

The final outcome of all this work is a two-volume, monumental manual of over 1,400 pages, which discusses the conditions in the half-century period under scrutiny in ten chapters. These main chapters are thematic units often extending over several hundred pages within which there are series of subdivisions at various levels rendering the volume a lucid structure. One can establish at first sight that the first main chapter (pp. 13-157) musters up sources for the period and as such contains a historiographical survey. Then the second main unit (pp. 159-423) offers a detailed historical summary basically in chronological order, moving from Emperor to Emperor. This is followed by thematic

⁴ Pretenders' struggle for the throne, repeated offensives by the barbarians, demographical decline, epidemics, economic stagnation, inflation, the disappearance of former artistic forms of expression (and that of inscriptions and monumental public buildings) were usually quoted as attributes of the thoroughgoing general crisis of the Imperium Romanum. Accordingly, the 3rd century appears to be a period of crisis in A. Alföldi's works (such as Alföldi 1967, 312-374) while in relation to the sense of crisis of the contemporaries see e.g. Alföldy 1989, 273-318 – both volumes thus bearing reference to crisis in their titles, moreover Alföldy labels the period as "Weltkrise".

⁵ In this context the research studies of K. Strobel and Chr. Witschel need to be singled out.

chapters: the third major block (pp. 425-580) discusses major populations and lands adjacent to the Empire, while the fourth one (pp. 581-712) presents some significant elements of Roman state administration. Chapter V (pp. 713-813) addresses social conditions, while Chapter VI (pp. 815-860) deals with economic history and the history of coinages; then Chapter VII (pp. 861-924) depicts the problems of cultural and intellectual life, while Chapter VIII (pp. 925-1024) has the character of a religious history. To be followed by Unit IX (pp. 1025-1053), which rounds off and sums up the contents of the previous sections, making at the same time an attempt at offering an overall characterization. All this is joined by Chapter X (pp. 1055-1198), which is a kind of appendix, "Fasti", containing chronological and prosopographical tables. The book is complemented with a list of abbreviations, a very detailed bibliography (pp. 1209-1358) and a few pictures as well.

The first main chapter devoted to the various types of sources and historiography (Quellen und Forschung) begins with a brief survey (U. Hartmann: Quellen, 15-17) that takes stock of sources related to the period under study, then, to be followed first by the discussion of written Latin and Greek records: texts of historiography and other literary works (U. Hartmann: Die literarischen Quellen, 19-44). The survey is very substantial but not only enumerates authors' writings that originated in the 3rd century but also relevant written records authored by historians of late antiquity as well as those by the history-writers of medieval Byzantium: and not only those works extant in their full entirety or only in fragments but also works that had completely been lost and can only be traced back through other records in an indirect fashion. The presentation is succinct apart from a sketchy introduction to the piece (and its author, if known) and a list of the most important modern editions of the texts is also offered and so is a sketchy review of relevant literature even.

Sequel to this, the much disputed *Historia Augusta*, the most important one of the written records is presented (K.-P. Johne: Die *Historia Augusta*, 45-51), then follows the discussion of epigraphic relics and papyrus finds as well as the enumeration of the most significant works dealing with the numismatic material related to the period (K. Ehling, U. Hartmann: Die Primärquellen, 53-58).

The chapter on *Historia Augusta* is focused primarily on the difficulties of source criticism and the ever so numerous fictitious elements in the emperor biographies in the period under scrutiny, especially calling attention to the fully fictitious nature of the biographies of four usurpers⁶ out of the "thirty tyrants"

⁶ Saturninus, who was construed on the model of the pretender with same name rising up against Probus, as well as Celsus, Censorinus and the Anatolian insurgent Trebellianus.

rising up against Gallienus following the presentation of uncertainties concerning the author's person and briefly presenting various hypotheses.

Then follows the discussion of the archaeological material dated to the decades under study (K. Schade: *Die Archäologie*, 59-87).

The author relies primarily on the findings and views of Chr. Witschel⁷ – above all she points out the difficulties of interpreting archaeological finds⁸, makes an attempt at assessing on the basis of archaeological finds what construction activities can be verified in the studied period. On these grounds she tries to answer the question how far the crisis can be grasped in the archaeological material in certain areas of the Roman Empire. She systematically reviews the different parts of the Empire⁹, singles out a few examples from each part, then draws the conclusion that it is not at all justified to speak about such a general, pervasive crisis as had formerly been assumed. In spite of the devastation resulting from warfare, she puts the emphasis on the phenomena of continuity and survival whereas in some locations she appears to have found evidence of prosperity. The dramatic decline in erecting pieces of epigraphy and the disappearance of major public construction activity are not interpreted as the manifestations of a general crisis, crisis, but as a sign of change in the preferred social status representation of the elite, and the reader's attention is called to the large number of reconstruction activities, fortification projects and the construction of villas for the notables.

Schade's line of argument is basically convincing, but in certain respects, his position is one-sided, for extensive fortification and restoration work and giving up extramural residential areas observed in several cases¹⁰ yet bear witness to external peril and threat¹¹ and the fringe provinces had sustained serious

⁷ For example *Soldatenkaiser*, 60.

⁸ It calls attention partly to the risk that archaeological finds not easily dated will actually be dated to a chronologically close but better known period of Roman history (e.g. the time of the Severans or that of the tetrarchy). The research creating in this „artificial” way a kind of shortage in relevant finds. Nor must one forget the problem of what happens when researchers are lured into the trap of tautology while relying mainly on preconceptions emerging from the overwhelmingly literary sources in interpreting sets of archaeological finds.

⁹ It is true, however, that due to limited space the presentation is rather uneven and sporadic in some cases it is limited to a city or two within individual parts of the Empire. For example, only Athens is made mention of within the Greek-populated South Balkan areas.

¹⁰ *Soldatenkaiser*, 64 and 69.

¹¹ In a similar way W. Eck also points out the devastation of warfare, the incursions of Barbarians and the insecurity of the population when examining the surroundings of Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium although based primarily on epigraphical and numismatic arguments. (see: Eck 2007, 31-43). His study emphasizes first of all that although crisis phenomena did not affect the whole Empire uniformly, but owing to the close ties between various regions, local problems affected more remote regions, the whole of Imperium Romanum,

blows, even if their significance had not come anywhere close to what had been assumed with regard to the whole of the Empire. The author is presumably right in that the broad picture of the period is much more complex and varied and more determined by local factors than had been assumed by scholarship.

The second part of the chapter presenting the archaeological material analyses traits observed in portrait sculpture and sarcophagus carving and mosaicist activity where ensuing changes are interpreted rather as a sign of transforming public taste as well as that of the emergence of new needs and outlook rather than as symptoms of a general crisis in manifesting themselves in the field of art.

The next unit (E. Baltrusch, E. Kettenhofen, A. Luther: Die orientalische literarische Überlieferung, 89-107) addresses a relatively less familiar group of sources, the Near-Eastern records on the period under study: It gives a short introduction of various Syrian, Middle- and Neo-Persian pieces as well as works in Arabic, Jewish, Georgian and Armenian. It likewise introduces the chronicles, works in ecclesiastical history and documents of martyrdom – all the sources that could provide information on the Roman Empire (mainly, of course, its Eastern territories). The presentation follows the same method as had been before in the case of earlier Greek and Latin texts: a short introduction to be followed by major editions, translations and the enumeration of the most important items of literature.

In the rest of the chapter the reader can acquaint himself with a very special group of sources: the inscriptions and reliefs belonging to the Sassanian rulers' status representation. (Ph. Huyse: Die sāsānidischen Inschriften und Felsreliefs, 109-123). The presentation is undoubtedly interesting, yet appears slightly to be the "odd one out" for these inscriptions and reliefs are significant relics of the Sassanian rulers' legitimation and status representation, however, the bulk of them cannot be included among the the sources of Roman history. Perhaps the only exceptions are I. Šābuhr's¹² epigraph found at Naqš-i Rostam (Res Gestae Divi Saporis) and five reliefs rendering his victories over the Roman Emperors. In the rest of the cases there is no direct bearing on Rome. The Sassanians are shown in the company of gods, amidst their courts or in the midst of hunting, being informed about their supreme skills at archery or – in the case of the epi-

moreover, their impact accumulated, multiplied and ultimately resulted in Empire-wide changes and crises as well as the disappearance of a sense of security on the part of the inhabitants (Eck 2007, 23-30).

¹² The names of Sassanian rulers crop up in a number of versions in modern research: the present review article will stick to the forms of names used in *Soldatenkaiser*.

graph of Narseh¹³ – we are told the story of their ascent to the throne. Therefore, the one-by-one introduction of these epigraphs and reliefs is rather unjustified – a more concise review of this group of sources would have been sufficient, or the whole chapter could have been placed elsewhere in the volume: in the third main unit, into the discussion of peoples and lands neighbouring on the Roman Empire as perhaps an excursion to the Sassanian Empire it would have fitted better the concept of the book.

As an end to the first main chapter there follows a review of research history (Th. Gerhardt: *Forschung*, 125-157), which extends from the beginning of modern historiography of Imperial Rome (E. Gibbon, J. Burckhardt) all the way to the latest professional literature available at the time of writing the book. The presentation can naturally not include all the fields of research for lack of space and is constrained mostly to the most comprehensive works of synthetic nature, as well as to those basic works and theories that, in turn, influenced scholarship for decades to come. This chapter highlights works by M. Rostovtzeff and F. Altheim, besides, substantively introduced are relevant works by A. Alföldi, H. Bengtson, G. Alföldy, K.-P. Johne and D. S. Potter and the views calling in question the traditional crisis-model (K. Strobel, Chr. Witschel), as well as monographs on individual Emperors (Chr. Körner, G. Kreucher).

The next is the most extensive unit of the book, which is a 260-page historical synopsis of events in the period, focused mainly on political and military events, turning points (*Die Ereignisse der Reichsgeschichte*). Five of the seven subchapters present in a chronological sequence the half century in question, the activities of the individual emperors from the ascent to the throne of Maximinus Thrax to the death of Carinus (U. Huttner: *Von Maximinus Thrax bis Aemilianus*, 161-221, A. Goltz–U. Hartmann: *Valerianus und Gallienus*, 223-295, U. Hartmann: *Claudius Gothicus und Aurelianus*, 297-323. K.-P. Johne: *Der “Senatskaiser” Tacitus*, 379-393, and G. Kreucher: *Probus und Carus*, 395-423). The two remaining parts forming a thematic block highlight the areas that temporarily freed themselves from the central administration; one is about Palmyra that temporarily controlled the eastern territories (U. Hartmann: *Das palmyrenische Teilreich*, 343-378) the other one is about the rival-emperors ruling in Gaul (A. Luther: *Das gallische Sonderreich*, 325-341).

Only a few more interesting elements in this chapter are to be highlighted.

¹³ Its presentation would, anyway, exceed the chronological boundaries of the present volume, for Narseh reigned between 293 and 302, that is, he was a contemporary and adversary of the tetrarchs.

One of the much disputed issues of the period is the chronology of the reigns of Valerianus and Gallienus, with special regard to the years around 260. The present volume dates Valerianus' Persian captivity in June 260, or early July, at the latest and dates in the summer of 260 both Postumus's usurpation in Gaul and that of Ingenuus along the Danube region¹⁴ - and related to the latter, the appearance of Regalianus as pretender to the throne is dated to the second half of 260.

Also interesting are the problems that emerged in relation to the reign of Tacitus. Classical authors testify to the passage of about half a year of interregnum prior to his ascent to the throne, but K.-P. Johne, the author of the relevant chapter negates its possibility (based primarily on the datings of Egyptian papyrus finds and assumes a transitional period of a few weeks (1-2 months) only. The other interesting issue is his traditionally close ties to the Senate. Classical historians characterized the senior ruler as one placed on the throne by the body from its own ranks. Contrariwise, the author assumes that Tacitus had had an equestrian military career and as a result of its successfulness he rose by an advanced age to become a member of the Senate or even one of the consuls – in the absence of direct evidence the analogy of the careers of other 3rd century people is used. The tradition of Tacitus being appointed by the Senate is explained by the fact that the most senior and respectable officer was not actually staying with some troops at the time of the sudden death of Aurelianus and his own imperial proclamation¹⁵, but in Italy, thus (singularly in his age) was in a position to follow the old tradition of the emperor's election confirmation by the Senate.

Next is the 3rd main unit of the opus that considers the peoples and states along the borders of the Roman Empire one by one (*Völker und Staaten an den Grenzen der Römischen Welt*). First of all along the European borders, on the outer banks of the Rhein and the Danube, there indigenous mostly Germanic groups are presented: (A. Goltz: *Die Völker an der nordwestlichen Reichsgrenze*, 427-447) and A. Goltz: *Die Völker an der mittleren und nordöstlichen Reichsgrenze*, 449-464). On the one hand, the ethnogenesis and the internal conditions, as well as the marauding incursions of the most important peoples, tribes (Franks, Alemans, Iuthungs[?], Goths, Vandals) are presented; while on the other hand we are offered an insight into the social changes explaining an increased scale of attacks (such as the institution of "military kingdoms" and the concomitant emergence of larger tribes) as well as into demographic

¹⁴ On the various researchers' approaches in this respect see e.g. Kovács 2008, 163-168.

¹⁵ Which may well have been initiated by the military and may have been a kind of compromise proposal.

movements and migrations, too. One can then acquaint himself with the African neighbours of the Empire (A. Gutschfeld: *Die Mauren*, 465-473, and A. Lohwasser: *Das meroitische Reich und die Blemmyer*, 571-580) as well as the Near Eastern areas and states located in the buffer-zone between the Sassanian Empire and Rome, not only the region of the Caucasus (E. Kettenhofen: *Die kaukasischen Reiche*, 475-500) and the Mesopotamian client-states (A. Luther: *Nordmesopotamien*, 501-509 and M. Schulz: *Die Charakene und die Juden Babyloniens*, 511-519), but the Arabs, too (U. Hartmann: *Die Araber*, 521-530). Finally a thorough survey is to be read about the great adversary of Rome, that is, the Persian Empire of the Sassanians (J. Wiesehöfer: *Das Reich der Sāsāniden*, 531-569).

This chapter is an undoubtedly instructive and useful reading and supplementary in nature. The study of ancient Rome cannot do without the knowledge of conditions of peoples and states bordering on the Empire, nevertheless often sadly neglected in research. This 150-page survey does, however, offer an introduction to the topic; descriptions generally being concise but thorough, - only rarely becoming overdetailed in an almost tiresome way (such as in the course of the presentation of Caucasian state-formations), at presenting the disputes surrounding research. To follow the line of presentations is, however, greatly aggravated by the absence of maps: only one can be found in the whole opus showing the entire Roman Empire in a page-size map, which is of little use, if any, in relation to the fringe areas. Some more detailed maps would have rendered it graphically more accessible and facilitated a better grasp – for the majority of readers do presumably not have abundant and thorough geographical knowledge of the Caucasian region.

The title of main unit IV of the book is “The Roman State” (*Der römische Staat*) – which accordingly addresses Roman state organization, the organs of governance and administration and their levels. One can read about the administration of individual provinces in the individual sub-chapters all the same as the structure of the military and about changes taking place in these spheres (T. Glas, U. Hartmann: *Die Provinzverwaltung*, 641-672, and M. P. Speidel: *Das Heer*, 673-690), as well as the administration of municipalities (Th. Gerhardt: *Die Städte*, 691-712) and the development of the Roman law (M. Schulz: *Das Recht*, 633-640) – primarily, however, the person of the emperor and the attributes of his power are under scrutiny (K.-P. Johne: *Das Kaisertum und die Herrscherwechsel*, 583-632).

The relevant subchapter first enumerates the changes concerning the personality of the emperors. The most outstanding of them all is that the dignity of emperors which had formerly been linked to the status of senatorial aristocracy had become available to individuals of equestrian background, moreover

to individuals of low birth who had worked themselves up into the equestrian order through their professional military careers. This trend is especially manifest after Gallienus and is closely related to the fact that the commanding posts of the military had got into the hands of experienced professional officers belonging to the equestrian order instead of the senatorial order. A further trait of significance is that the ties between the Emperors' power and Rome as the seat of the empire underwent some loosening in the period in question. The majority of emperors not only had come from the periphery of the Empire but also ascended to the throne from the commanding post of a province, and spent most of their time in the war away from Rome.

Another striking feature of the period is the instability of Imperial power: the frequent and violent transfers of power, and the repeated failure of establishing dynasties – the occupants of the throne would sometimes (within just a few weeks or months) typically meet a tragic end often to be shared by members of their family, too. The quick succession of emperors ascending to the throne could no longer point to their successful predecessors and their glorious feats in the course of laying the foundations of their authority and legitimacy – therefore one of the salient features of the period is the inadequacy of the ruler's legitimation. Various attempts were then made to correct this inadequacy. One major attempt purporting the founding of a new dynasty while the other aimed at an increased sacralization of Imperial power. The chapter follows up on these attempts. It enumerates the known sons of the emperors, their spouses and siblings if any – that is members of the family who got or could have got a role in dynastic politics; while endeavours aiming at linking the rulers' power to that of the divines are also presented. The latter tendency is particularly expressed in the case of Sol¹⁶ and similarly anticipating the age of tetrarchy as had been the assumed appearance of the ornamented imperial vestments in late antiquity in the case of Aurelian. Simultaneously, the legitimizing role of the Senate is declining. K.-P. Johne, author of the chapter, points out, that the last emperors in the period did not strive to obtain even the subsequent approval of their power by the Senate.

In this manner the chapter does equally emphasize the transitional character of the period, the transformational processes pointing towards late antiquity as well as the phenomena that render this period unique and which are most typical of this half-century.¹⁷ Since, however, the bulk of crisis phenomena were related to the instability of the emperor's power, this survey touches upon a

¹⁶ In greater detail on this: Berrens 2004, 61-139 and 205-228.

¹⁷ For example, the role of the emperors' spouses and their complex, gradually developing titulary – in more detail see: *Soldatenkaiser*, 608-615.

good number of key momentums of the period and thus greatly facilitates the identification and reconstruction of interdependencies.

Main unit V – which is, at the same time, the opening chapter in volume II of the book – discusses social conditions in Rome (Die römische Gesellschaft) with a respective subchapter being devoted first to the Senatorial Order to be followed by one on the characteristic features and role of the *ordo equester* as well as the changes it underwent in the period (M. Heil: Der Senat, 715-736, and M. Heil: Der Ritterstand, 737-761). Sequel to it, insight is offered into the life of lower social strata as well as into their social tensions and problems (Th. Gerhardt: Unterschichten und soziale Konflikte, 763-789). Subsequent to the general discussion two regions of the Empire namely Isauria in Asia Minor and Egypt are given detailed introduction (K. Feld: Isaurien, pp. 791-800 and Fr. Herklotz: Ägypten, 801-813).

It is perhaps worth calling attention to an interesting feature of the book, that is, the fact that the eastern half of the Empire is often given more attention in the descriptions than the western territories. Both highlighted regions presented in detail are to be found in the Eastern parts and in the subchapter discussing the lower stratum of society are mentioned only Gaul (more precisely in relation to the social unrest and riots unfolding by the 280's) and the Roman *plebs* in relation to the western half of the Empire. All this can be easily justified by quoting the conditions of sources for the respective regions: Egyptian papyrus finds, the greater written tradition of the more urbanized and developed Eastern regions, the information handed down in the legacy of the Greek authors centered in the Eastern Mediterranean offer greater possibilities for the study of social conditions than the few and sporadic data available for the western provinces.

Main unit VI of the book addresses financial issues and coinage (Wirtschaft und Münzwesen). All this is divided into two subchapters, the first, a somewhat longer one (K. Ruffing: Die Wirtschaft, 817-841), offers a general discussion of the economic features of the period, while the shorter second part (K. Ehling: Das Münzwesen, 843-860) focuses specifically on the questions of coinage and circulation. The two chapters are, however, closely related to each other for basically both rely on Strobel's ideas and findings and try to reconstruct the economic conditions of the period. Accordingly both call in question the validity of a comprehensive interpretation model for the general, empire-wide economic crisis and emphasize the need to depict a more detailed and balanced picture.

At the outset the first subchapter reviews some such theories¹⁸ that wish to characterize the 3rd century as the period of a general economic crisis – then followed by the refutation of the main element of these respective theories. K. Ruffing first puts under scrutiny the widely accepted theory of inflation brought about by the dramatic decline of the precious-metal content of coinages throughout the 3rd century. He calls in question the long-accepted direct relationship between the precious-metal content of the coins and their contemporary buying power and emphasizes that the buying power of money was secured in Imperial Rome primarily by a state guarantee and the public trust in the currency – accordingly intractable inflation is not related to the decline in precious-metal content, but rather to the shaken trust of the public in the state and its currency. This is dated on the basis of various Syrian and Egyptian finds (which permit an insight into the local price conditions) only to the time of Aurelian, that is, he dates the serious inflation devastating and paralysing economic life only to the final decades of the soldier emperors, instead of encompassing the entire 3rd century.

It is only after this that the author subjects demographic decline, the large scale decrease in the population of the Empire to close scrutiny as a possible explanation for the economic crisis. However, he soon comes to the conclusion that ancient sources on diminishing population are far from being convincing or of general validity as was formerly thought by scholarship and the reduced population as a result of epidemics and wars did not need to inevitably result in economic recession. The chapter places special stress on the fact that the formerly assumed radical shrinking in the number of slaves is not borne out by Egyptian sources. Thus it is not tenable to assume that this development was the cause of the economic crisis and the factor shaping conditions in late antiquity. Related to this is his enquiry into the hypothesis that only increased state expenses on the military and overtaxation resulted in economic crisis. He acknowledges that tax-collection took place in a more systematic manner than before and certain (extraordinary) taxes were more frequently levied, but no dramatic increase in tax-burden is deemed verifiable – in all, he dismisses every cause that is customarily mentioned as generative of the 3rd century crisis.

Further on, one can read a short survey of the economic conditions in the respective parts of the Empire. Ruffing does not question the negative economic impact of the political and military difficulties in the period, the inauspicious factors stagnation and decline being especially striking when compared with earlier, long-lasting prosperity, he, however, repeatedly calls attention to the

¹⁸ For example, the hypotheses of M. Rostovtzeff, Fr. Oertel, Th. Pekáry and Fr. De Martino – see: *Soldatenkaiser*, 817-820.

economically stable, sometimes even flourishing areas.¹⁹ He disputes the general nature of negative tendencies, and would rather direct attention to significant local differences, and strive in each possible case to emphasize continuity and economic survival and post-wartime reconstruction.

In sub-chapter 2 Ehling first surveys the most important features of coinage in the period (the increased number of mints, the radical decline in precious-metal content) then goes on to discuss the question of inflation. The author dates its emergence to the final decades of the age of soldier-emperors and sets the precondition of a dramatically increased quantity of money in circulation which can be observed from the end of the reign of Gallienus, from the time of Claudius Gothicus onwards. The cause of inflation is identified in Aurelian's mistaken attempt at financial reform.²⁰

All that one can read in these two subchapters is undoubtedly thought-provoking and convincing in several respects – albeit, at first reading, assumptions related to inflation appear to conform too much to modern opinions and economic theories. It must be noted at the same time, that all arguments put forth in order to support price stability up to the 270's are related exclusively to the Eastern half of the Empire (the Syrian region and Egypt). These regions were by- and large better-off, more stable economically and more urbanized. Compared with the western provinces (especially the fringe areas), we can thus assume that they managed better financially the hard times.²¹ Furthermore it needs to be pointed out, that these very regions and municipalities had a time-honoured tradition of local coinage, which, in turn, slowed and mitigated the local manifestation of financial problems – this would perhaps be necessary to examine if the findings were to be generalized. Sources taken from Dura Europos are – on top of it – related only to the first half of the period, their validity cannot be extended to later decades.

Similarly, the question arises, that providing that the stability of the currency depended on the trust of the population, what maintained public trust in such crucial conditions as the series of uprisings in the 260's? Why was it only at the time of Aurelian that the currency collapsed?

Definitive answer to it can only be expected as a result of further studies where systematic study of numismatic finds can be of assistance to scholarship

¹⁹ Such as certain regions in Asia Minor and some regions in Africa as well as Egypt.

²⁰ According to the author's hypothesis, seeing the enormous quantity of low-quality coins in circulation, Aurelian wanted to introduce monetary reforms in the course of which the old coins were to have been traded in for the new Antoninians at a 1:20 rate which, however, was not accepted by the population and the trust in the currency got shaken to its foundations.

²¹ How much more deeply shaken were poorer regions of less stable economic foundations, the case of Isauria is a good example: *Soldatenkaiser*, 790-800.

– for the finds presumably contain such coins that the contemporaries considered worthy of accumulating owing to their standard value.

Main chapter VII (Bildung und Wissenschaft) addresses issues of erudition and culture: it is education that is first discussed (K. Pietzner: *Bildung*, 863-891), then it is followed by another detailed presentation of historiography (as was introduced in the first main chapter of the book – U. Hartmann: *Die Geschichtsschreibung*, 893-916); and we can finally read about contemporary developments in philosophy (I. Männlein-Robert: *Die Philosophie*, 917-924).

Main unit VIII throws light on some interesting aspects of religious conditions in the period (*Die Religionen*). Following a very concise presentation of traditional Roman religion (M. Schuol: *Die paganen Religionen*, 927-935) there is a relatively detailed introduction to the emperor cult (Fr. Herklotz: *Der Kaiserkult*, 937-948) as well as that of Christianity and Manichaeism (K. Pietzner: *Die Christen*, 973-1007, and D. Durkin-Meisterernst: *Die Manichäer*, 1009-1024). We can also read a thorough analysis about the life of Jewry: about those in Palestine and those living in the diaspora respectively (E. Baltrusch: *Die Juden Palästinas*, 949-964, and M. Schuol: *Das Diaspora-Judentum*, 965-971).

All this is followed as it were, by a conclusive summary (which is main unit IX of the book) which is an attempt at rendering in a concise way and highlighting the most important observations of the opus, that is, the salient features of the period (K.-P. Johne, U. Hartmann: *Krise und Transformation des Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert*, 1025-1053).

The authors of the chapter do not find it substantiated that there was a general crisis permeating all facets of life all over the Empire in the 3rd century. As to the economic conditions they call attention to marked local differences, the simultaneity of war-torn and struggling regions (e.g. fringe provinces along the Rhein and the Danube, Isauria,) and the devastated but quickly recovering regions (e.g. the area of Syria) as well as the prosperous regions not affected by warfare (e.g. Africa). In the case of intellectual and artistic life, as well as in social and religious conditions they consider long-lasting transformational processes as more typical. Nevertheless, they emphasize the serious problems, political and military affairs, as well as the evidence for a crisis affecting the government sphere, the military and imperial power, too. The nearly simultaneous external attacks against various parts of the Empire brought to the surface the inner weaknesses of the system of the principatus. The increased burden of the Empire and the failures caused by it led, in turn, to repeated usurpations resulting in a quick succession of power transfers which attempts at establishing dynasties proved abortive: imperial power had become unstable – which, in turn, aggravated problems. The chapter gives a summary of both the symptoms

of crisis and the attempts at solving them which often point towards the tetrarchy of late antiquity. For all the reforms and changes, the desperate attempts of the soldier emperors of the 3rd century at finding the way out to solve the military crisis, even if not successful, were closely linked to the successful transformations performed during the tetrarchy preparing as it were, the ground to them: in this manner the period of the 3rd century can be regarded as the apex of a slow transition from the early Empire to late antiquity.

The book, however, does not come to an end at this point: first we find a more than 100 page appendix (Th. Gerhardt, U. Hartmann: *Fasti*, 1055-1198) (incorporating besides the enumeration of emperors, consuls, praefectus urbi and praefectus praetorio even the procurators of provinces – together with the most important literature related to them!) then supplemented with an also very substantial and thorough bibliography. Finally, there is an alphabetized index and a few pages of photos and a solitary map appear rather modest in view of the very pretentious and voluminous book.

After having reviewed all this one can establish that a very meticulous and solid summary has been put before him/her about the studied period in the 3rd century, an introduction that permits insight into various facets of the age and successfully synthesizes results in fields falling relatively wide apart from each other. The individual authors may well represent different approaches in many issues, yet the book does not appear to be fragmented or rambling, but it retains the uniformity of presentations throughout. As a result – and as intended – the book can serve as a useful introduction, a manual in the study of the period, while the notification system and the abundant bibliography will serve further orientation and deeper exploration in matters of detail.

It is, however, worth mentioning a few negative features, as well. A significant one among them is that the editors of the book deliberately gave up on the idea of systematically presenting the individual parts of the Roman Empire in any greater detail. Naturally no single overview can attain full comprehensiveness. There will always remain parts and aspects that are missing from such a volume, however, certain regions in the Empire could have been given an (at least sketchy) review in an opus of this scale. This imperfection is all the more striking, because the territories adjacent to the Empire's border regions are introduced: this gives rise to the paradox that one can read more in this book about the tribes resident along the borders of Rome than the provinces next door. The fact is thrown into even greater relief by the special feature of the book that the Eastern territories again receive closer attention than the western

provinces²² – thus we end up having hardly any word mentioned of Hispania or Britannia. The priority treatment of the Eastern territories is, of course, not unjustified, for their economic and political role is remarkable, and also sources on them are available in relative abundance – moreover, several of the book’s authors take professional research interest in these regions.

All in all, we have a substantial thoroughly researched book, that can gainfully be used even if one is interested in the general picture or wishes only to obtain a swift overview of one of the partial issues. Whichever is the case, the book may provide a valuable point of departure in both.

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²² Apart from the examples already quoted, one can again observe this tendency in the unit on the religions of the age, for the discussion of Christianity and Manichaeism as well as that of Judaism directs attention to the Eastern half of the Mediterranean.