This volume offers, through its 22 chapters, a series of vivid snapshots of various aspects of late antique literary culture. Less vivid are the links uniting these detailed sketches to each other and to the broader historical picture.

Inbar Graiver Tel Aviv University

Roger Riera, Daniel Gómez-Castro and Toni Ñaco del Hoyo (eds.), *Ancient Disasters and Crisis Management in Classical Antiquity*, Akanthina 2016. 164 pp. [Hardback] ISBN: 9788375312171.

Rome’s achievements were so gargantuan that it is easy to see them as being somehow inevitable. From a small city state occupying a few square miles of land around the river Tiber, Rome became master of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, an area containing perhaps 25% of the world's population at the time. But the path to such success was in fact strewn with numerous crises and disasters. From Cannae to Hadrianople, Rome suffered countless military setbacks as well as being on the receiving end of regular food shortages and periodic plagues and earthquakes, to say nothing of volcanic eruptions. And, of course, Rome’s expansion itself inflicted overwhelming military catastrophe on many of those it conquered, whether through death on the battlefield, enslavement or displacement. There has been an upsurge in interest in the significance of these difficult periods and what they can tell us about the Roman world and how its inhabitants established and understood their social reality. This rich collection of articles makes a useful and interesting addition to this debate by providing detailed case studies of what exactly disaster meant on the ground within a broader theoretical framework that tries to isolate the difference between modern and ancient understandings of these episodes. Taken alongside another recent collection edited by Juan Ramón Carbó, *El final de los tiempos: perspectivas religiosas de la catástrofe en la Antigüedad*, the book underlines the important contribution currently being made by Spanish scholars to this field.

The aim of the collection is to relate the impact that particular disasters had with public policies that were carried out in their aftermath. The result is “to illustrate that the actions of patronage and euergetism...were not an unusual occurrence” and had little to do with altruism or what we might term “humanitarian aid” (p. 13). The reason for this discrepancy between ancient and modern perceptions about what mattered in a disaster is, of course, that these terrible events were perceived very differently, with the ancient elite often seeing them as a necessary part of pursuing their military or political aims or simply as an opportunity to exercise and extend their patronage networks. The modern world has a clear understanding that a disaster is an inherently bad thing. For the ancients, they knew all too well how much suffering a disaster could generate but often saw that as no more than an inevitable part of human existence.

This difference in attitudes comes out particularly well in the chapter by Barreda and Sanz on earthquakes during the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius. Whereas the crucial ingredient in the modern perception of disaster is the victims, for the Roman authorities it was more often the buildings. Both emperors frequently responded to petitions for help by allocating funds for the reconstruction effort. Of course, there were practical limits as to why rulers focused their aid on longer term rebuilding rather than the immediate disaster relief which we would see as so necessary. The slow speed of communications in the pre-industrial world would always mean that any relief they sent would arrive too late to help the victims in the immediate aftermath. But there was also a clear sense that private loss was not a matter for the authorities or, at least, was not something they could do much to rectify. Instead help was focused on public renewal, with aid given in the form of tax exemptions rather than any immediate injection of funds to help the relief effort. There was an expectation that the financial help emperors did give to help rebuild devastated cities would be reciprocated with structural expressions of gratitude, manifested in

publicly displayed statues and inscriptions. But it is also clear that accepting such help was not a simple matter. Imperial commissioners were needed to prevent confrontations between local elites and themselves had to be careful not to tread on the toes of local governors. Aid was a political matter.

We find this indifference towards the difficulties which people faced also reflected in the texts of ancient writers, which the first chapter examines. History was something that should focus on far weightier matters than the wretched fate of a group of poor victims. The details of their suffering were "not important enough for history," as Pliny the Younger said of his account of the eruption of Vesuvius. What concerned Roman writers most was morality, which disasters revealed in abundance. Their accounts are often peppered with tales carefully selected to deliver an appropriate moral message for their readership. Roman sources and their audiences also saw a concrete link between military and political disorder and both natural and man-made disasters. When disaster struck it was clear that something was wrong with the normal world order. This in part explains why emperors did feel some moral pressure to provide assistance. There was a strong moral claim in Augustus' claim to legitimacy, and, as *pater patriae*, he had a duty to recognise the suffering of his "children" and do something to help alleviate it.

But imperial aid was not automatic. Muňiz rightly points out that such shows of political solidarity "did not depend on the disaster type, but rather on its aftermath and its consequences on the lives and property of those affected" (p.13). Behaviour had more to do with the extent, duration, intensity and harshness than with the disaster's cause. But above all, the response of the authorities depended on the who: whether those who had been affected were of sufficiently high status or were sufficiently well-connected to use their patronage links to have their pleas heard. The majority of people were never in so fortunate a position and so were reliant on their local leadership's ability to attract the attention of the imperial ear if any long term reconstruction effort was to benefit from central government financing.

Other chapters highlight the widespread vulnerability to disasters that most people experienced in antiquity. Xenophon's Anabasis is used to show how inflicting disaster was a perfectly acceptable part of military strategy, regardless of the human cost. War was, in effect, the ultimate determinant of status: the winners treated the vanquished as they wished and the ability to do so was seen as a perfectly normal part of competitive human interrelations. As García and Gómez-Castro point out, a leader could be praised for his disaster relief when in reality all he was doing was solving the humanitarian crisis that was being caused by his own military campaign.

Riera and Principal's chapter on the local Iberian leader, Indibilis, who used the clash of the second Punic War as an opportunity to gain undisputed leadership of his people, the Llergetes, gives a fascinating and detailed examination of the political infighting that went on in a small state faced with two warring superpowers on its doorstep. It is easy to see the Punic War as a straight fight between Carthage and Rome but many other minor players were caught up in it and, despite their relative weakness, they strove to play an active role in the conflict and shape its outcome to their own advantage. Two other chapters focus on the use of population deportation and forced relocations as part of political, post-war settlements. In one of these Lydia Matthews discusses the case of the Salassi, who were systematically sold into extended slavery to eradicate a group who were so bold as to act autonomously, contrary to Rome's interests. Rome was quite prepared to generate a humanitarian crisis because it not only physically removed this obstructive people but destroyed their collective memory and social networks. This was peace-making as far as the Romans were concerned and those few Salassi who remained, presumably a pro-Roman faction, did benefit from the new Roman lifestyle, but only in an urban context that stamped its Romanness upon them at every corner.

This is a detailed and thought-provoking collection which shows how Roman conceptions of disasters took little notice of the humanitarian crises which seem so obvious to us. People accepted this as normal, probably because no other alternative seemed possible. Vulnerability to disaster

and powerlessness in the face of catastrophe were seen as simply part of the human condition. For those scholars looking to research in this field, the bibliographies at the end of each chapter are particularly good. One minor point is that the title seems tautologous: there is no need for the word "ancient". But, throughout, this volume underlines how ancient crises were managed according to personal relationships, local rivalries, propaganda needs, and as opportunities for redevelopment. In other words, disaster response was laden with all the ulterior motives, diplomatic issues, and political interests which sadly often still predominate today.

Jerry Toner Churchill College, Cambridge