

C.R. Whittaker, *Rome and its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire*, London: Routledge, 2004. 246 pages. ISBN 0-415-31200-0.

Frontiers are ubiquitous and have a long history, and studies of frontiers and their complex problems, taken from various points of view, are legion. The beginnings of modern research on the frontiers of the Roman Empire go back to the nineteenth century, and in the second half of the twentieth century the international Roman Frontier Studies Congress, which was first held in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1949, became a major event for the periodic gathering of many a scholar interested in the subject.¹ Unlike most of the studies published by the RFSC, or those published by various institutes that specialize in the so-called *Limes-Forschungen*, which usually approach the subject from archaeological and purely military angles (notably roads, fortresses and camps, the disposition of the army units, questions of tactics and strategy etc.), C. Whittaker's work on the Roman frontiers is a comprehensive study, which takes into account social, economic and ecological factors as well.

In an article published almost twenty-five years ago,² W. put forward several proposals for the understanding of the nature of the Roman frontiers and the explanation of the way they operated: 'Roman frontiers frequently cut through zones of relative homogeneity — and in particular of economic or social homogeneity'; 'frontiers should not be regarded as linear barriers but as zones of differentiation'; 'zones of differentiation are by definition zones of symbiotic exchange — exchange between systems of intensive and extensive production'; 'frontiers are by their marginal nature necessarily agents of change'. These proposals were a reaction to the scholarly view which posits that in creating the frontiers, the Roman government was guided by purely military and rational criteria. Contesting E. Luttwak's famous thesis,³ W. argued that 'there is no reason why all frontiers should have identical explanations where local conditions differed and it is perhaps a misguided effort to search for a single, empire-wide "Grand Strategy"'. A full-scale treatment and substantiation of W.'s ideas on the subject, presented to a large extent through the aforementioned proposals, appeared in a book, first published in French and afterwards in an expanded and revised English edition.⁴

The present book is a collection of ten papers, of which six (nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 9, now slightly modified and updated) appeared between the years 1995-2002 and the other four (1, 6, 8 and 10) are new contributions. The first chapter serves as an introduction and presents a concise overview of the discussed topics and of the problems underlying the study of frontiers, with references to the most recent works. W. may be right in stating that the modern interest in frontiers is associated with the numerous contemporary boundary disputes and their geo-political consequences. This modern interest, however, can hardly be singled out as the main motive which led generations of scholars to engage in the research of Roman frontiers. On the other hand, one may well agree with the statement that 'the Roman frontiers should be studied in their own right as well as with the weight of history on their backs' (3). W. finds corroboration for the four proposals he enunciated in the article referred to above, and for his view about the ecological limits to

¹ For a survey see A.R. Birley, 'Fifty Years of Roman Frontier Studies', in P. Freeman, J. Bennett, Z.T. Fiema and B. Hoffmann (eds.), *Limes XVIII — Proceedings of the XVIIIth International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies* held in Amman, Jordan (September, 2000), *BAR Int. Ser.* 1084, Oxford, 2002, I, 1-10.

² C.R. Whittaker, 'Trade and Frontiers of the Roman Empire', in P. Garnsey and C.R. Whittaker (eds.), *Trade and Famine in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge, 1983, 110-25.

³ *Ibid.*, 110; E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Baltimore, 1976.

⁴ *Les frontières de l'empire romain*, Paris 1989; *Frontiers of the Roman Empire. A Social and Economic Study*, Baltimore, 1994. One should also mention W.'s chapter on the frontiers in A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and D. Rathbone (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History*, XI (2nd edition), Cambridge, 2000, 293-319.

empire, explained in his 1994 book, in studies dealing with social anthropology and geography and in recent archaeological publications. Succinctly examining the evidence and arguments for and against the idea of a linear defensive frontier, based on Grand Strategy, W. concludes that the frontiers did not constitute limits to the empire. Other topics discussed, to some extent, in the introduction include the various aspects of military supplies to the frontiers and the commercial relations with peoples beyond the frontiers, the invasions and the collapse of the frontiers in the Later Empire, as well as their role in the transformation of late antique into medieval society, and trade with India. All these topics are examined in detail in the other chapters of the book.

In the second chapter, W. tackles the question of 'Grand Strategy'. He accepts that there is evidence of war planning in certain specific cases, that there was some assessment of the economic consequences of annexations, that security, and the means with which to pay for it, must have figured high in the emperor's preoccupations and that there was some low-level strategic thinking. All these, as well as other factors and pieces of evidence, that have been adduced by E. Luttwak and his followers to support his thesis, do not indicate (in W.'s view) the existence of a Roman Grand Strategy, that is, of 'an integrated effort towards a political end'. W. highlights three additional important points: war ideology should not be confused with strategy; the Roman ideology of expansion and the claim for universal dominion persisted through the Late Empire; purely defensive strategy never replaced the traditional Roman proclivity to aggressive expansion. In other words, it is wrong to perceive the Roman frontiers as static, linear and defensive barriers. W.'s analysis of the evidence and his position with regard to the question of Grand Strategy seem to me rather persuasive, but it is a pity that he has not clarified his view concerning the connection between frontiers and *limites*. At one place he writes: 'The word *limes* is best defined as "the land that forms the furthest extent of a country's settled or inhabited region"' (6).⁵ Is that land alone to be regarded as a Roman frontier? At any rate, the definition is incongruous with, e.g., the territory of the *limes Palaestinae* which extended over the whole of Palaestina Prima, P. Secunda and P. Tertia, as is clearly implied in Honorius' and Arcadius' letter from 409.⁶ Moreover, Luttwak's theory of Roman Grand Strategy envisages the operation of a certain tactical and strategical system that is supposed to have been established in the *limites* of the empire. In my opinion, there is no real evidence for the existence of such a system, which admittedly can be found in many of the *Limes-Forschungen*; regrettably W. has not enunciated his view of this issue.

Taking his cue from Fergus Millar, B. Isaac pointed out in his critique of Luttwak's theory, that 'the Romans did not have a sufficiently clear or accurate notion of topographical realities to allow them to conceive of the overall military situation in global strategic terms'.⁷ In Chap. 4 we now have an excellent exposition of the characteristics and deficiencies of Roman maps, which in fact were hardly more than itineraries. The main features that characterized these maps were roads and towns, *castra*, *castelli*, water points and food stores that were marked alongside the roads. These were not topographical maps, nor did they result in a general survey map. They reflected a linear vision of space, that is, they were the product of a uni-dimensional perception of the world. The itineraries, in turn, dominated the perception of space by lines and not by shapes. While it is impossible to tell which came first, the false geographic perception or the map, it is clear that the Romans' orientation of space was distorted; Pliny, for instance, puts Genova, Rome and Campania on the same latitude. Another instructive observation made by W. is the apparent absence of frontiers as limits to empire in the various Roman cartographic sources, including literary accounts and descriptions (Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy etc.) and that of cosmographic lists which testify to the absence of a sense of passing through a barrier when moving beyond the territories under direct Roman administration. Last, but not least, is the evidence W. presents to show that, in their

⁵ The definition follows the discussion of the distinction between 'inner' versus 'outer' *limes* in P. Mayerson, *Monks, Martyrs, Soldiers and Saracens*, Jerusalem, 1994, 301-3.

⁶ *Cod.Theod.* 7.4.30. See I. Shatzman, *AJAH* 8 (1983), 132-4.

⁷ B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire. The Roman Army in the East*, Oxford, 1990, 401-2.

campaigns, generals, most notably Julius Caesar, did not use maps. There is not one word about a map in Onosander's *Strategikos* dedicated to Q. Veranius, governor of Britain in 59 CE, nor in the *Strategemata* of Frontinus, an experienced general. Maps are not to be found even in discussions on the choice of a battle-site or on the manner of selecting a rendezvous in retreat. The conclusion one may draw from W.'s enlightening examination of the sources is that, because of the inherent limitations of the geographical perception and thought of the Romans and because of the characteristic deficiencies of their maps, a theory of Grand Strategy could hardly have occurred to them, both conceptually and practically.

Invasions and immigration in the Later Empire are discussed in two chapters, and in both W. demonstrates that the literary accounts are biased, distorted or false. In Chap. 3, originally published in French, he claims that the extent of the Germanic invasions into the empire from the second half of the third to the mid fifth centuries, and particularly of the catastrophic destruction that they had supposedly wrought are much exaggerated. It is wrong to imagine massive 'nations on the move'. In fact, we are dealing with the infiltration through the frontiers of small groups or bands of warriors (54). According to W., small raids could be as devastating as large assaults, but he finds no evidence to suggest that many cities declined; on the contrary, it is clear that many others continued to flourish. W., therefore, argues that the areas of the countryside that suffered from inroads did not remain desolate but recovered. In Chap. 10 W. notes the diverse statuses and conditions of the immigrants (illegal immigrants, military *voluntarii*, imported slaves, *dediticii*, *foederati*, etc.) and suggests that they numbered about a million over the fourth century, possibly even twice as much. They might have augmented the population of the empire, often calculated at 60 million, by about 0.5% in each generation, which would have increased the population stock over the century by 1.6% (202). There are some difficulties with these figures, even if they are merely intended to 'give an idea of what the possible cumulative effect might have been'. First, the estimate or guess according to which there were one or two million immigrants is quite arbitrary. True, the various figures and data recorded in the available sources are surely inflated, but there is no way of telling by how much,⁸ and estimates of three or four million may be right, wrong, or as close to the true number as those suggested by W. If 'movements of large tribal groups across the frontiers' took place from time to time (205), which is somewhat inconsistent with W.'s objection to the notion of massive 'nations on the move' (above), the higher estimates could be more likely. Second, the immigrants did not disperse equally all over the empire, but were mainly to be found (at least for some time) in the frontier provinces, where they formed a much higher percentage of the population — a circumstance ignored by W. However, the main issue with which this chapter deals is the policy and attitude of the Roman government and population towards the foreign immigrants. Xenophobia and discrimination continued to some extent and cases of exploitation and abuse occurred, but were not omnipresent, and W. points out ways and means by which the immigrants were able to enter and become integrated in the diverse sections of Roman society. W. is right to highlight the military, economic and political benefits that were gained by both state and society from the immigrants. However, the statement that the Roman 'ethnic blindness',⁹ 'allowed the relatively easy transformation from the Roman Empire to the successor, medieval kingdom' (213) ignores the contribution of the immigrant-invaders to the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West. One cannot help thinking that such an euphemistic presentation of late antique Rome has much to do with W.'s open critique of the attitudes of the modern nation-state and contemporary Europe towards outsiders and illegal immigrants, which are explicitly and unfavourably compared to the Roman policy of accommodation and open frontiers. But the judgmental historical comparison is questionable. After all, in certain respects 'fall' rather

⁸ Whittaker, 1994 (n. 4 above), 231; G.E.M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient World*, London, 1981, 509-18.

⁹ For the unimportance of ethnicity in the Later Roman Empire, W. refers to P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy: 489-554*, Cambridge, 1997.

than 'transformation' may still be regarded as the right term to describe the dissolution of the western part of the Roman empire.¹⁰ This brings me back to W.'s conclusion in Chap. 3, in which he advocates the view that what had occurred in the Later Roman Empire was 'symbiosis and osmosis, continuity not disruption, accommodation not conflict', yet warns that we should not equate cultural change with military crisis (59). This may be challenged by the suggestion that disruption, conflict and military crisis were as current in the Late Empire as symbiosis, continuity, accommodation and cultural change.

The issue of military supply has long been neglected by Roman military historians, partly due to the paucity of relevant evidence. In the last dozen years or so, however, several books dealing with the subject have been published. W. dealt with military supply in both his 1983 article and 1994 book, and here, in Chap. 5, he aims to examine the contribution of the recent publications of documents, particularly the tablets from Vindolanda, to the understanding of the working of the Roman system. As in his book, the focus is upon four questions. First, was military supply handled directly by the army or was it given out by contract to civilians? The new documents provide little information on this point, and thus we have to be content with the traditional generalization claiming that while private entrepreneurs supplied much of the needs, the army retained direct responsibility for basic provisions in the early second century. Second, the documents indicate that in Britain the frontier army received most of the supplies from distant areas, although not necessarily from overseas, which means that the economic benefits went mainly to big traders and not to small, locally-based dealers. Third, payment in cash is prominent in transactions carried out within the camp and its vicinity, but there is also evidence that seems to show that suppliers were paid in kind for transport services. There is little in the tablets to answer the related question whether the goods supplied to the army were requisitioned as tax or purchased. Finally, the Vindolanda documents show little as to the quantities of military supplies that came from beyond the frontiers. Nevertheless, W. thinks that the goods purchased or traded by the Roman army made such an economic impact, that, as a result, the 'barbarian' communities succeeded in developing their social and political power. This may be doubted, if only because the available evidence suggests rather that the vast majority of the supplies came from within the empire. What, then, is the contribution of the recently published documents? As W. rightly observes, they underline the importance of military supply to the Roman authorities and they also add many specific data illustrating the working of the system. But there is no major advance and the new documents have not provided us with any instructive evidence or significant data that may allow us to give more definite answers to the questions posed by W.

Sex on the frontiers is the subject W. explores in Chap. 6. The formation of the frontiers went through three phases: conquest, occupation and consolidation, with each phase characterized by a certain sexual behaviour on the part of the soldiers of the Roman army. W. presents evidence, not particularly impressive, to show that the *lixae* and *calones* who followed the Roman armies on campaigns included women to satisfy the sexual needs of the soldiers.¹¹ More instructive and interesting, although not entirely new, is what W. has to say about the sexual image of the conquest apparently stemming from and reflected in the gruesome reality. Invasions and subjugation of the enemy were described in art and literature as violent penetration and rape, with the enemy and his country feminized. Abundant evidence demonstrates that these were not merely metaphors, and hence, the obvious question that needs to be asked is to what extent did the Roman army use rape as an instrument of systematic terror, as was the case most recently in Bosnia and Kosovo. W.'s conclusion is that although it was common knowledge that war provided opportunities for rape, 'there is little reason to think that rape was considered a strategic weapon for war' (132). If the emphasis is on well-planned strategy, W. is probably right, but since rape was an

¹⁰ See B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, Oxford, 2005.

¹¹ Slave women could be found among the *calones*, the soldiers' servants, but not among the *lixae*. See R. Feig Vishnia, 'The Shadow Army — The *Lixae* and the Roman Legions', *ZPE* 139 (2002), 265-72.

integral element in the sacking (*direptio*) of cities,¹² and since it was quite normal for the Romans to sack captured cities, including Roman cities in civil wars (notably Perusia in 40 BCE and Cremona in 69 CE), other peoples may well have regarded raping as intrinsic to the regular harshness of Roman war-methods.¹³ Opportunities for this kind of wholesale raping diminished considerably during the occupation phase, although occasional molestation of the native population continued to occur. There is some evidence that prostitutes offered their services at the semi-permanent or permanent camps which were established during this phase, but the existence of 'military' brothels can hardly be confirmed by archaeological finds. An important contribution of the Vindolanda tablets is their testimony that the wives of various local commanding officers lived with their husbands and children in the camp from the earliest occupation of North Britain, a fact which is not entirely consistent with the Augustan *militaris disciplina*. Evidence from Syria and Egypt indicates that common soldiers began to form stable liaisons with local women, but the extent of the phenomenon is far from clear. The major change in the sexual habits of the military that took place with the consolidation of the frontiers in the second century is the significant increase in the number of soldiers' 'wives', although their partnership was not legalized until the third century. In the main, these 'wives' were, probably, daughters of veterans, slave girls and freedwomen, but some were native women and ex-prostitutes. W. suggests that one significant source for wives were women-slaves imported across the frontiers. This 'was one more way in which the frontiers acted as the bridge between the Roman Empire and the supposed barbarian world' (138). As he admits himself, this is no more than a hypothesis.

The Roman view of India is the subject of Chap. 7, and W. concentrates on the following points: the idea of Roman rule over all the countries of the world includes India; the concept of 'otherness' fits the Roman image of India, for it is described in Roman accounts as a reverse mirror of a different world; India and its inhabitants are assigned barbarian sexual practices, indulgence in luxurious items, bizarre customs, abnormal physiological forms, and corruption of morals. The Indian stereotypes, notably the image of the barbarous Indian, that can be found in the works of many an author from the Augustan period onwards are based on the anthropological accounts of Hellenistic writers like Megasthenes and Eratosthenes, even though authors of the Imperial period had more accurate and reliable information on India. In sum, W. argues, the Roman perception of India is 'ancient Orientalism', that is, a tool of racial domination, often combined with gender domination and sexual degradation. W.'s final verdict is open to several reservations, and here I will make two comments only. There was no one image of India, as W. himself notes. For example, Strabo's description of the Indians as a people characterized by simplicity and frugality, respecting the truth and having neither thieves nor lawsuits (15.1, 53; cf. Ael. *Hist. Var.* 4.1), is indeed a reverse mirror of Roman society. However, untrue as it may be, Strabo's description cannot be construed as an attempt to justify the imperial ambitions of the Roman élite and to reflect its sense of superiority (*pace* W., 157-8). Secondly, the ideology of Roman universal rule originated in the second century BCE, and it can hardly be associated with modern Orientalistic thought.¹⁴

In Chap. 8 W. gives an outline of Roman trade with India and examines the physical and commercial factors, as well as the structural characteristics of the Roman economy that lay behind the economic decisions that the Romans took in trading with India. One of W.'s attractive

¹² A. Ziolkowski, 'Urbs Direpta, or How the Romans Sacked Cities', in J. Rich and G. Shipley (eds.), *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, 1993, 70-74 (not mentioned by W.); *pace* Ziolkowski, the general did not have to order his soldiers to rape, for, as he shows himself, the license of sacking included raping.

¹³ Cf. W.V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome 327-70 B.C.*, Oxford, 1979, 50-52.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Orientalism does not appear in the recent comprehensive study of B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton, 2004; it seems that some scholars do not like this omission.

suggestions is that the tremendous growth of trade with India in the Augustan period was occasioned by the availability of money, coming in from the rich spoils acquired from the conquest of Egypt, and the Spanish and Illyrian wars, that required investment. The formation of new political powers in South India was another factor that facilitated the growth of Indian trade in the first century CE. One may ask what W.'s analysis of the Roman economy and Indian trade has to do with the subject of the frontiers. One possible answer is that it helps him to show that the frontiers were zones of symbiotic exchange. And indeed, W.'s aim is to present an updated view of Rome beyond the imperial frontiers, particularly in relation to India (20), and this allows him to look at the frontiers from a different perspective.

Chap. 9 is an admirable survey of European perceptions of the frontiers of the Roman Empire and the changes they underwent from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. Two main views may be distinguished: the first argues that natural frontiers reinforced by fortresses or by artificial ramparts constituted the defense of the empire and became moral barriers of exclusion between civilization and barbarism; the second, that natural frontiers did not exist but were, according to one view, conventions imposed by the strong on the weak. They were zones, not lines, and were defined, according to another view, by language and race, not by territory. The once accepted relevance of the experience of the Roman Empire to modern political realities began to be contested in the nineteenth century. Modern realities, in turn, have transformed the orthodox perception of the Roman frontiers. The attack upon the existence of natural frontiers is supported, according to W., by archaeology which shows that they neither restrained expansion nor constituted defensive barriers, but were lines of communications and supply. Ultimately, W. raises the possibility that with the diminishing role of the nation-state, the very concept of territoriality and frontiers is also out of date.¹⁵ Even in Europe this trend encounters difficulties and does not operate everywhere; as to the other parts of the world, his suggestion seems to be wishful thinking rather than a realistic assessment.

Lucidly written, the book abounds in insightful observations and thoughtful interpretations, even if they are provocative and controversial at times. W. is erudite and keeps abreast of most recent publications, and his approach is often oriented towards contemporary issues. All these make the book fascinating and instructive reading.

Mistakes and misprints are very rare, but note the following: Cicero's statement in the Third Philippic on Antony's deeds in 43 is quoted as an account of the Perusine war of 40 BCE (131), Pliny the Elder is described as a Roman admiral who died in 70 CE (155), on ix one should read P. Erdkamp, on 53 the correct date of the Alan settlement is 442 CE, and on 188 the right reading is Königsberg.

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Emma Dench, *Romulus' Asylum: Roman identities from the Age of Alexander to the Age of Hadrian*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 12 + 442 pages. ISBN 0-19-815051-2.

P.A. Brunt meets Monica Ali: this is a wide-ranging book, exhilarating and exasperating by turns. 'Roman self-perception as well as more recent perceptions of Roman identity', as D(ench) herself defines the topic. The Romans, that is, as perceived then, and now, by friends, and by foes, and by themselves, in terms of definitions, outlook and stories (or myths), allowing for historical and generic change, in terms of ancient perceptions or post-imperialist critiques. It is greatly to D.'s credit that she will tackle anything and anyone, from interracial hypocrisy in New Labour Britain, to Josephus (on whom I leave her competence to competent judges). Her readiness to be side-tracked is perhaps even greater than the reviewer's own and I would only urge her to address the

¹⁵ W. follows here B. Badie, *La fin des territoires. Essai sur le désordre international et sur l'utilité sociale du respect*, Paris, 1995.