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Clifford Ando. *Imperial Rome AD 193 to 284: The Critical Century.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012. XIV, 256 S. $50.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7486-2051-7; $156.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7486-2050-0.

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The Crisis of the Third Century

Clifford Ando's *Imperial Rome AD 193 to 284* attempts to make sense of the political, military, and economic chaos that nearly brought the Roman Empire to its knees in the third century CE. The poor quantity and quality of extant source material makes this period especially difficult to understand and analyze. Through nine chapters and a brief concluding section, Ando offers not only a general narrative of the people and events of the period but also an exploration of broad-scale changes that occurred to the Roman state and society. The continual upheavals of the third century had a causal role in the shaping of these changes. Ando balances his narrative with three interspersed chapters focusing specifically on the roles of law, religion, and government during the crisis. He also provides a helpful catalogue of the numerous emperors and usurpers of this period along with a brief chronology chart, both of which should prove indispensable to any lay reader. Ando is aware of the need to clarify the sources and main secondary material that accompanies this topic and offers a concise guide to further reading at the end of the book. His bibliography also should prove useful to those interested in delving deeper into the often shadowy world of the third century. Finally, the work is a part of an eight-piece series, The Edinburgh History of Ancient Rome, which covers the beginning of the Roman Republic to the reign of Justinian. Ando's book is the sixth entry in the series and examines one of the more difficult periods of Roman history.

Ando approaches the subject of crisis in the third century through an investigation of Roman imperial politics and the primary role that it played in both the decline and recovery of the empire. He is reacting against those who have denied the existence or importance of the crisis of the third century. He rejects discounting imperial politics in favor of social and economic life, material over textual evidence, and regional over macro-regional assessment. He advocates the broad connectivity of the provinces and the capacity of the Roman state to deeply affect local life on a daily basis. Ando has no doubts about the widespread violence, economic downturn, and agricultural deterioration of this period. There can be no denying for him that the Roman Empire faced a serious crisis. The genesis of this crisis he places in the reign of Septimius Severus and the Severan dynasty. Ando argues that the Severans undercut the conventional structures of imperial "legitimation" that protected emperors in office from usurpers and that no alternative structure emerged afterward to construct social consensus. This resulted in cycles of violence that exposed the fatal weakness of the Roman political system, namely, the lack of established rules to imperial ascension and succession. As the empire descended into internal chaos, Rome lost its military reputation and capacity to maintain its frontiers. This in turn led to an increase in Germanic and Persian invasions of the empire.

The one constant throughout this period and the aspect that Ando believes above all allowed the Roman Empire to weather the storm of the third-century crisis was the continuity of Roman political culture. The framework and system of Rome's political culture remained unitary even among the splinter states of the Gallic and Palmyrene empires. There was no effort by any usurper or either of the splinter states to abandon the traditions of Roman imperial rule. There remained an unwavering "confidence in the Romanness of the world" (p. 226). This continuity of political culture allowed for the relatively smooth reincorporation of the splinter states into the empire under Aurelian and had kept the Roman ship afloat through fifty years of considerable military, political, and economic turmoil.

In his first chapter, Ando offers a succinct background summary of the Roman Empire on the eve of the third century. It is here that he introduces his discussion of the formation of the conventional structures

of imperial "legitimation" that the Severans came to destroy. He argues that Augustus and the emperors of the Principate colluded with the Senate to provide a sense of electoral process and legal authority to help remove the threat of armies creating emperors, in a sense monopolizing legitimacy. The subsequent two chapters investigate the civil war that followed the death of Commodus, the reign of Septimius Severus, the rule of the other Severans, and the rise of Sassanian Persia as a considerable military threat to the Roman Empire. Ando finds Severus and his dynasty responsible for facilitating the ruin that was to come to the Roman state for three main reasons: Severus's dynasty proved to be incompetent, Severus increased the power in politics of the army, and his dismantling of the Parthian Empire gave rise to the far more dangerous Sassanians. In chapter 4, Ando discusses the role of the Antonine Constitution in facilitating the legal transformation of the empire. Ando argues that Caracalla's grant of universal citizenship meant that the legal pluralism of the early empire gave way to the "universalization" of metropolitan law. His next chapter provides a discussion of the missteps and deterioration of the empire from the reign of Maximinus to Philip the Arab. Chapter 6 investigates changes in the sociology of religion and the construction of religious identities during the third century. Chapter 7 charts the near collapse of the empire from the reign of Decius to Gallienus. Meanwhile, chapter 8 examines the role of the Roman central government in daily life and its determinate role in the survival of the Roman state in the third century. Finally, chapter 9 discusses the revival of Roman power under Claudius II and Aurelian. Although their reigns were brief and followed by another short period of instability, their efforts opened the door to the reestablishment of Roman military integrity and the efforts of Diocletian.

The third century is a difficult period to analyze in large part because of the restrictions of our source material. Ando does an adequate job of sifting through the debris and creating an intelligible picture. Yet his work is not without issue. Although his narrative of events is generally solid, there are points where the reader is left wanting deeper analysis and clearer syntax. Further, his references are rather sparse. Chapters 4, 6, and 8 sometimes suffer from a lack of clarity. Ando too often moves from point to point without reinforcing where his argument has been and where it is going. Unfortunately this sometimes leads to his arguments getting lost in the mix. The addition of a brief concluding section to these chapters would have been helpful since they claim to demonstrate the broad-scale changes of the state and society that are fundamental to Ando's overall analysis of the period.

More specifically, Ando's rejection of the argument that Caracalla issued the Antonine Constitution for financial reasons in order to raise more taxes is inadequately backed with evidence. In fact, Ando perhaps puts too much stock in the Antonine Constitution as a "turning point in the history of the empire" (p. 77). The decree perhaps changed the judicial environment of the empire, but I am left unconvinced that it was the legal epoch that Ando seems to believe. By referring to the "idiocy" of Severus and his dynasty on multiple occasions, Ando displays an aversion to the Severans that I believe does nothing to advance his case (pp. 62, 105). His examples of the role that the structures of empire played in microregional relations are from the more developed eastern portion of the empire. Perhaps the experience was different in the more rural west? Finally, his narrative ends rather abruptly with the appointment of Diocletian. To be fair, since Ando's work is a part of a series, the reign of Diocletian is outside the scope of his book. However, even a brief investigation of how Diocletian managed to be different than almost two dozen predecessors and survive the terrible cycle of the third century would have been a great benefit and useful bookend to the study.

These concerns aside, Ando should be commended for taking such a muddled topic as the third-century crisis and providing such an approachable narrative of events. His efforts may not be comprehensive, but he does far more than just hit the highlights. The paperback edition should make the book more accessible to students, and it could prove valuable as an undergraduate text. This book will be an important addition to reference shelves and university libraries.

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