

Eckhard Meyer-Zwiffelhofer: Πολιτικῶς ἄρχειν. Zum Regierungsstil der senatorischen Statthalter in den kaiserzeitlichen griechischen Provinzen. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2002 (*Historia Einzelschriften* 165). 369 pp., Euro 88,– ISBN 3-515-07648-4.

Meyer-Zwiffelhofer's habilitation (FernUniversität Hagen, 1999), now published as a volume of *Historia Einzelschriften*, is a welcome contribution to the study of the multi-faceted way in which Roman senators governed the Greek-speaking provinces of the empire. The title of the well-documented book, translated more or less as „governing in a manner related to local citizens“, comes from the last book of Strabo (17, 3, 24), in which the geographer summarises the process of the subjugation of the known world by Rome in two phrases, the other being waging war (διὰ τὸ πολεμεῖν καὶ πολιτικῶς ἄρχειν). As is shown in the detailed overview of scholarly work on the topic in the introductory chapter, the „konstitutionelle Perspektive“ from the early 20th century, based on the 19th-century giant Mommsen, has now been replaced by a „Beschreibung der provinziellen Wirklichkeit“ (42), leading in some recent approaches to an accentuation of the „flexibility of administrative practice“¹ at the expense of a more systematic character of government of the Roman provinces. In his own book, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer follows this trend: judicial conditions and magisterial competence are less important, and emphasis is placed instead on the activities of the governors as Roman magistrates in the provinces. He bases his study on the „zumeist ritualisierten schriftlichen und mündlichen Verkehrsformen“ (47) between governors and provincials. Both the results of this „government by correspondence“² and a governor's undertakings such as visiting cities, presiding over law cases and conferring (or receiving) honours, have a „ostentativen, foralen Charakter“ (47). Studying Roman provincial administration not from the central but from the provincial point of view leads to more appreciation of the role of the local elites – it also throws light on the question of which governmental practices received special documentation.³

- 1 Thus A. Bowman: Provincial administration and taxation, in: id., E. Champlin and A. Lintott (eds.): *Cambridge Ancient History X* (Cambridge sec. ed. 1996), 368, quoted by Meyer-Zwiffelhofer (42).
- 2 Cf. F. Millar: Trajan: government by correspondence, in: J. González (ed.): *Traiano, Emperador de Roma. Saggi di Storia Antica* 16, Rome 2000, 363–388.
- 3 „Zugleich lässt sich besser ermessen, welche Herrschafts- und Regierungspraktiken von den einzelnen Gruppen der Provinzialbevölkerung besonders wahrgenommen und dokumentiert wurden und von welchen Tätigkeiten wir nur noch wenig oder nichts mehr erfahren, was sich nicht zuletzt in der Überlieferungsproblematik bestimmter Quellentypen dokumentiert“ (49).

Of course, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer does not ignore constitutional aspects completely. Chapter II („Die Provinzen und ihre Statthalter aus römischer Sicht“) discusses the official powers and qualifications of Senatorial governors on the basis of the notions of *imperium* according to Cassius Dio and *officium* according to Ulpian, and in this manner creates a „normative Panorama der Provinzialregierung, das den Hintergrund für die Fallgeschichten aus den Provinzen bilden soll“ (49). A distinction is made between the historian’s description of what sort of powers Emperor and Senate supply governors with, and the lawyer’s presentation of „dem Ermessensspielraum der Statthalter“ (73), whereby Meyer-Zwiffelhofer draws attention to some of the performative terminology that plays a role in later chapters.

Following the „allgemeiner Handlungsrahmen und Erwartungshorizont“ (74) from chapter II, in chapter III („Statthalter vor Ort: Sechs Fallgeschichten aus provinzieller Sicht“) six case studies reconstruct „der Handlungsspielraum und die Regierungspraxis“ of the governor: checking the overburdening of his province, engaging in the proceedings surrounding his *adventus*, mediating conflicts between antagonist settlements, being (in part) responsible for the continuing functioning of the system in which local notables performed public service, granting privileges (within limits), and guaranteeing peacefulness (where the author uses the example of the Christian martyr acts).

Neither court cases against Roman authorities who were accused of illegal acquisition of provincial belongings nor honorific inscriptions set up for governors can be used as hard evidence for „bad“ or „good“ provincial administration as such. Rather, as Meyer-Zwiffelhofer points out (173), they function as a useful barometer of the success of diplomatic relations in the provinces. There was, nonetheless, both in Rome and in the provinces a certain joint understanding of how a governor ought to manage the affairs in his sphere of action. Chapter IV („Vorsorgen, Schützen, Wohltun, Danken. Der patronale Diskurs über Kaiser, Statthalter und Untertanen“) deals with the conditions under which Roman authorities were received favourably by the provincials. Firstly, ethical criteria are reviewed in as far as they can be established from incidental remarks in Pliny’s Letters and from „einzelne programmatische Äusserungen“ (174) in inscribed edicts issued by governors or even an emperor. Secondly, the category of inscriptions in which Roman governors are honoured (mostly accompanying long-lost statues) is examined as the clearest expression of observation and judgement on the part of the provincials of the governor’s activities. As the ethical criteria often allude to the competitiveness of the individual cities in a province, it does not come as a surprise that the large majority of honorific inscriptions is set up by cities or their subgroups. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer argues that, on the level of political ritual and civic representation, „das heisst der architektonischen, bildlichen und sprachlichen Semantik und Symbolik der Ehrenmale“ (221), governors were treated by cities in the same way as local notables. This,

then, created a slightly ambiguous situation, in which on the one hand the Roman authorities were forced in a position „die sie in der provinziellen Herrschaftskonstellation nur zu Lasten anderer Poleis . . . einnehmen konnten“ (221) – which could have serious consequences –, but which also expressed the governor’s dependence on local collaboration and on the elite’s „Integration in die provinziellen Beziehungsgeflechte“ (222).

In chapter V („Befehlen, Ehren, Privilegieren, Diskriminieren: Der statthalterliche Regierungsstil im provinziellen Beziehungsgeflecht“) Meyer-Zwiffelhofer analyses governmental features, as they appeared in the six case studies in chapter III, in a more systematic manner. The governor’s activities are studied in the context of his provincial tours, the rituals surrounding his arrival, the network of a province’s social relations, local traditions and pre-Roman or earlier imperial decisions, dependence on – and use of – writings from the emperor himself, display of documents by cities and smaller settlements from which it appeared „dass sich der Kaiser oder der Statthalter ‚persönlich‘ um ihre Belange gekümmert hatte“ (297), social tensions within a single city, and rivalries between different cities. As for the latter element, „der Statthalter, der zu offensichtlich eine Seite bevorzugt hatte, musste damit rechnen, nach seiner Amtszeit dafür bestraft zu werden. Dies war der eigentliche Hintergrund für die meisten Repetundenklagen“ (314). Last but not least, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer discusses, under the label „Herrschaftsmittel“ (316), the governor’s power to grant and to forbid whenever cities sought his confirmation and ratification of endowments by, privileges for, or tributes to local notables. Throughout the chapter, attention is drawn to the ritualised style of communication. The government of the provinces was no bureaucracy – instead „alles politische und herrschaftliche Handeln ist zutiefst von Ehrerwartungen geprägt“ (331). The case that Roman provincial administration can be described only partially in terms of the constitutional position of the relevant authorities is made successfully.

A résumé (VI) is followed by five short appendices on relevant source material and an extensive bibliography, but it is an unfortunate untidiness that the list of abbreviations (announced on p. 6) is missing on p. 370. Meyer-Zwiffelhofer does not pretend to have produced an „enzyklopädische Behandlung der kaiserzeitlichen Statthalterschaft“ (44), but has certainly succeeded in his aim to contribute to a well-ordered and accessible presentation of the activities of the senatorial governors in the provinces of the Roman East. Further work on the topic remains to be done. Military duties and occupations of governors are deliberately left out of consideration, and so is, with some exceptions, the evidence relating to the minor equestrian governors.⁴ As for the major equestrian

4 The latter because they played „eine eher marginale bzw. ephemere Rolle in der östlichen Reichshälfte“ (44), and mostly „verstanden dem nächsten senatorischen Amtsinhaber wie der Prokurator von Iudäa dem syrischen Gouverneur“

governor of Egypt, he is not taken into account for the traditional excuse that this was „eine in mancherlei Hinsicht untypische Provinz“ (45).

As regards the multifarious evidence that remained to be studied, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer does so not by commonly dividing it between tasks as commander-in-chief, collector of taxes and judge, but by focussing on the relation between governors and local notables,⁵ who shared the same elite education (*παιδεία*, hence the linguistic definition of the book's subject). The result is a characterization of how Rome ruled its Eastern provinces which pays attention not only to the logistic side of things, but also (explicitly and implicitly) to certain facets of Roman (elite) mentality.⁶ For teaching purposes in the Anglo-Saxon world an English version would be welcome.

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(45). A comparative look at both the major senatorial and the minor equestrian governors, however, could have the merit of pointing out any possible differentiation in approach on the part of the provincials.

- 5 See now also the collection of papers in L. de Blois (ed.): *Administration, Propogography and Appointment Policies in the Roman Empire*. Proceedings of the First Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, 27 BC – AD 406), Leiden, June 28 - July 1, 2000 (Amsterdam 2001), esp. G.P. Burton: The imperial state and its impact on the role and status of local magistrates and councillors in the provinces of the empire, 202–214, and A. Kriekhaus: *Roma communis nostra patria est?* Zum Einfluss des römischen Staates auf die Beziehungen zwischen Senatoren und ihren Heimatstädten in der Hohen Kaiserzeit, 230–245.
- 6 More than I found recognised, Meyer-Zwiffelhofer seems to have justly applied lessons learned from the still too often overlooked J.E. Lendon: *Empire of Honour. The Art of Government in the Roman World*. Oxford 1997.
- 7 Thanks are due to the British Academy for support through the award of a Postdoctoral Fellowship.