

Alberto Cafaro: *Governare l'impero. La praefectura fabrum fra legami personali e azione politica (II sec. a.C. – III sec. d.C.)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2021 (Historia-Einzelschriften 262). 613 p. € 92.00. ISBN: 978-3-515-12522-2.

With this monograph dedicated to the figure of the *praefectus fabrum*, Alberto Cafaro has produced a meticulous work of ancient history that examines in detail and with due methodological caution the totality of the evidence surviving for this essential, but evanescent, element in the administration of imperial Rome. The volume (more than 600 pages) consists of a monograph proper (11–263) that is followed and complemented by numerous prosopographical catalogues (264–520) and indices (521–532 and 575–613) as well as an exhaustive bibliography (533–574). The monographic section, headed by a brief introduction (11–14), is divided into three parts that deal with methodology (15–30), the *praefecti fabrum* who served under the Republic (31–164), and the *praefecti fabrum* who served under the Principate (165–253), with a coda in the form of a conclusion (254–263). It should be observed that the discussion of the *praefecti fabrum* of the Republic is largely dedicated to prosopography (47–59 and 80–164), effectively providing a first catalogue that is organised according to chronology rather than alphabetical order. The prosopographical catalogues denominated as such deal with the Principate and are six in number, dedicated to the Julio-Claudian era (265–382), the Flavian era (383–422), the period from Nerva to the Severans (423–489), the Severan era (489–492), *praefecti fabri* of uncertain date (492–499), and anonymous *praefecti fabri* (499–520). These are immediately followed by an index for the prosopographical catalogues, which not only covers those whose names survive (521–530) and the anonymous instances (530–531), but also contains an appendix listing those inscriptions in which there is a hypothetical reference to the *praefectura fabrum*. The bibliography furnishes both a list of expansions for the abbreviations utilised (533–536) and more than eight hundred items (536–574). Lastly, there are indices for references to the ancient sources (575–587), to names (587–610), and to topics of note (611–613). Manifestly the work of an epigraphist, this volume is destined to long remain the standard work on the subject of the *praefectus fabrum*. The care in production displayed by both author and publisher makes this volume an immense pleasure to use as well as an essential reference work.

For the period of the Republic, where the evidence for the position is almost exclusively literary, Cafaro deals with sixteen figures embracing an arc of time stretching from 108 to 30 BCE. Expanding upon the perennially useful list published by Kathryn Welch (Sydney) in 1995¹ and responding to the by-and-large excessive criticisms of Ernst Badian in 1997², Cafaro has provided a highly readable and useful summary of the evidence for these figures of the late Republic. The analysis is dispassionate and persuasive. For instance, the treatment of the figure of P. Volumnius Eutrapelus (no. 13 = p. 152–155) nicely restates the case made by Welch for identifying the *praefectus fabrum* P. Volumnius (Nep. Att. 12.4) with the Antonian *familiaris* P. Volumnius Eutrapelus.³ While it is true that the identification is a hypothesis, all of the circumstantial evidence points to such a conclusion, and humanity would still be mentally in the Pleistocene but for the ability to entertain plausible hypotheses. The reviewer would add that the citation of publications such as Alison Keith's 2011 discussion of the courtesan *Lycoris-Volumnia-Cytheris*⁴ nicely reveals the author at his best: up-to-date and alert to the full range of evidence and modern discussion. All people working on the late Republic will wish to consult and cite this catalogue.

The same holds true, *a fortiori*, for the Principate. Breaking new ground by providing a complete listing of all known individuals attested as *praefecti fabrum*, Cafaro makes readily available a sizeable body of evidence stretching from Augustus to the Severan emperors. There are 371 named individuals and a further 59 *anonymi*. Aside from the individual's name or assigned designation, each entry contains five elements: epigraphic references; *origo*; chronology; bibliography; and discussion. Cafaro offers a leisurely, thorough discursive treatment in the monographic section of this book, taking readers through issues such as the access of Italians and provincials to the *praefectura fabrum*, the importance of acquaintances and familial ties, the relationship between the position of *praefectus fabrum* and membership in

- 1 K. E. Welch: The Office of *praefectus fabrum* in the Late Republic. In: Chiron 25, 1995, 131–145.
- 2 E. Badian: Notes on a Recent List of *praefecti fabrum* under the Republic. In: Chiron 27, 1997, 1–19.
- 3 M.-C. Ferrière: Les partisans d'Antoine. Des orphelins de César aux complices de Cléopâtre. Bordeaux 2007 (Scripta antiqua 20), 193–194 (catalogue no. 143).
- 4 A. Keith: Lycoris Galli/Volumnia Cytheris: a Greek Courtesan in Rome. In: European Network on Gender Studies in Antiquity 1, 2011, 23–53.

the equestrian order, and the significance of the reign of the emperor Claudius, and the eventual disappearance of the *praefectura fabrum* in the early third century AD. Naturally, this discussion is intimately tied to the evidence assembled in the six catalogues that follow. It is fascinating to see how the *praefectura fabrum* fit into the full and variegated career of an individual such as C. Stertinius Xenophon of Kos (catalogue no. 161), the personal physician of the emperor Claudius and the individual who secured tax-free status for the island of Kos. So, too, it is intriguing to observe that the Athenian noble Ti. Claudius Oenophilus (catalogue no. 207), who appears to have been the first individual from Athens to have served as *praefectus fabrum*, only did so once the Flavian dynasty was firmly situated upon the imperial throne. The list might be easily extended. The catalogue, as well as the discursive exercise in the monograph, makes for informative, enjoyable reading in its own right.

The eventual discontinuance of the *praefectura fabrum* on the cusp of Late Antiquity is a phenomenon that is likewise well documented through the numbers to be had from this meticulous collection of epigraphic material for the Principate. Given the fact that an individual might serve as *praefectus fabrum* more than once, Cafaro's presentation of the statistics in terms of individuals is methodologically less than altogether satisfactory. Nevertheless, the observation that only seventeen out of the 104 individuals that can be dated to the second century AD can with certainty be assigned to the latter half of that century (237) is sufficiently grounded in the details of the evidence to warrant not only talk of a decline in the evidence, but also the inference of a progressive phasing out of the office. The latest securely dated (491) *praefectus fabrum* is Q. Cosconius Fronto (catalogue no. 353), whose extensive *cursus* begins with this office and is overall attested as having occurred during the joint reign of Septimius Severus and the young Antoninus (AD 197–211). It very much looks as though the *praefectura fabrum* was a moribund institution by the time that Septimius Severus ascended the throne, which renders otiose Cafaro's talk of the institution's definitive abandonment in the chaos following the overthrow of the Severan dynasty some forty years later (253). Some two centuries later, when writing about this institution and its origins, Flavius Vegetius would be reduced to working from his own speculation and literary source(s) of an antiquarian nature written under the Republic or earliest Principate. Although Cafaro eloquently defends the reliability of the testimony of Vege-

tius (27), the reviewer finds the use of *index* by Vegetius to be redolent of the fourth century AD and later and is therefore inclined to disregard such evidence.

One is reminded of Sir Fergus Millar's celebrated formulation of how to define the Roman emperor: "The emperor was what the emperor did".⁵ The problem here, however, is the laconic, reticent nature of the source material available to the historian of ancient Rome. The literary sources represent the *praefectus fabrum* as often engaged in advising or undertaking delicate missions of a political nature, and the epigraphic sources provide a reasonably detailed illustration of the social provenance of those who served as *praefecti fabrum* from the Julio-Claudian to the Severan dynasties. Nonetheless, none of these sources describes what precisely was involved in fulfilling the role of *praefectus fabrum*. Consequently, the title of this excellent monograph (*Governare l'impero*) seems somewhat excessive, arguably *una forzatura*. *Publicani* were involved in the collecting of taxes and imposts, *primipili* commanded companies of men in the legions, and *ab epistulis* dealt with correspondence, to cite but three examples of categories deeply involved in the governance of the Empire. But what actually did *praefecti fabrum* do? The reviewer remains unclear, not because of any *défaillance* on the part of the author (or the reviewer) but rather because of the nebulous quality of the source material available to us. This monograph does an admirable job of marshalling the totality of the known evidence and offers a lucid, readable analysis, but fundamental questions perforce remain.

5 F. Millar: *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC – AD 337)*. Ithaca, NY 1977, 6.

Richard Westall, Rome
richard.westall@gmail.com

www.plekos.de

Empfohlene Zitierweise

Richard Westall: Rezension zu: Alberto Cafaro: *Governare l'impero. La praefectura fabrum fra legami personali e azione politica (II sec. a.C. – III sec. d.C.)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2021 (Historia-Einzelschriften 262). In: *Plekos* 23, 2021, 313–316 (URL: <http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2021/r-cafaro.pdf>).
