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Nadine Viermann: *Herakleios, der schwitzende Kaiser*

Is it a coincidence that two German studies on the emperor Heraclius and late Roman monarchy were published in the same year, the one under review here by Nadine Viermann and the other by Theresia Raum which I have reviewed recently for *sehepunkte* (<http://www.sehepunkte.de/2021/12/35800.html>)? [1] Both monographs display the renewed interest in the changes and mechanisms of late Roman imperial leadership in general and in the reign of Heraclius in particular. Not surprisingly, there is considerable overlap between the two studies such as the focus on Constantinople, the remilitarization of the emperorship under Heraclius and the attention for the return of the Cross to Jerusalem by Heraclius. However, there are also significant differences such as a more profound examination by Viermann of the influence of the army on the position and authority of the emperor in Constantinople, or the focus by Raum on the various groups the emperor had to come to terms with and the (economic) circumstances he had to deal with, which both determined his room for manoeuvre.

Viermann examines how eastern Roman/early Byzantine emperors were able to sustain their leadership. Her particular attention is on the reign of Heraclius whose rule showed considerable transformation in comparison with that of the emperors before him. She analyses his reign in a structural way thereby distancing herself (as Raum does) from Kaegi's standard work which examines Heraclius' reign in a biographical way. [2] In her introduction (chapter 1) Viermann offers a survey of the current state of research regarding Heraclius' long imperial rule (610-641) and late Roman emperorship, and discusses at length the available literary sources in Greek, Latin, Syriac, Armenian and Arabic.

The relationship between the emperor and the military apparatus is discussed in detail in chapter 2. Since the fifth century emperors stayed put in Constantinople, did not actively participate in military campaigns and left warfare to their generals. Even though the sacralisation and liturgification of east Roman emperorship helped enormously in sustaining their position in Constantinople, emperors remained dependent on their soldiers and the loyalty of their generals. Apart from elite troops stationed in Constantinople who functioned as imperial guards, most troops were based all over the empire and had no direct contact with the emperor. For the stability of an emperor's rule much depended on his control over the army and the fidelity of the army commanders, particularly the *magister militum*. This required the emperor's genuine interest and care for the soldiers as well as for a subtle interplay between the imperial court and the military leaders, and sometimes for imperial action by getting rid of army leaders, for instance in case of threatening usurpations or generals gaining too much influence. The influence of army chiefs was probably greatest in the mechanisms of non-dynastic succession; they could put forward their own candidate. In spite of what has sometimes been argued, Viermann makes clear that despite the fact that emperors were not active in the field as supreme military commander, the army was still a crucial factor for sustaining an emperor's rule.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the dynamics of violent regime change. Viermann discusses the military coup of Phocas in 602 by which he deposed his predecessor Mauricius. Phocas, who was an outsider, never had much support in Constantinople. Resistance against Phocas and the backing of elite groups in the capital offered Heraclius the opportunity to take power in 610 - a regime change that was started several years earlier under Heraclius senior, exarch of Carthage. Viermann devotes considerable attention to coronation rituals and the transformations these rituals underwent in terms of space and time and as public events. Remarkably, Viermann dedicates very few words to the rather central role of the patriarch in these rituals.

Under Heraclius a remilitarization of the emperorship took place which is the subject of chapter 4. In contrast to others (e.g. Raum), Viernmann argues that Heraclius already took up an active military role early in his reign. In 612 he went to Caesarea to deliberate with his general Priscus after a defeat against the Persians. In 613 he left Constantinople for Antioch with the intention of fighting the Persians but he was probably already on his way back when the Roman forces were crushed by the army of Chosroes II. Heraclius only started to act successfully as an active military commander in the 620s. The chapter also discusses Heraclius' dynasty building. He made his young son Heraclius *Augustus* and his daughter Eudokia *Augusta* and he nominated family members for strategic (military) positions. The loyalty of his entourage made it possible for Heraclius to transform from an emperor whose place was since Arcadius (395-408) in Constantinople to a ruler who again took up a functioning military role as commander of his troops. It also consolidated his position with the army, as Viernmann argues, and reduced the destabilizing of his rule by the troops. The (re)presentation of his regime in words and images is of the greatest importance for a ruler. The poet George of Pisidia favoured Heraclius' rule in a number of his works. In chapter 3 Viernmann discusses his poem *In Heraclium ex Africa redeuntem* about Heraclius's coming to power, and in chapter 5 - one of the most interesting of this study in my view - she analyses other poems in honour of Heraclius, in particular those about his military campaigns against the Persians (*Expeditio Persica*) and the Avars (*In Bonum and Bellum Avaricum*) as well as the *Heraclias* . The fact that he left Constantinople and took up the role of supreme commander required a redefinition of the position of the emperor and of his relationship with the various groups in the capital. George's panegyrics were not only a communicative link between the emperor, the Constantinopolitan elite and the church, but also conveyed a revised representation of the emperor. As Viernmann argues, as general he fought together with his soldiers - the striking title of the book is derived from George's *Expeditio Persica* that presents an image of Heraclius as tired, dirty and sweating after a battle. But his military leadership was also religiously inspired; he was a Christian supreme commander who fought against the infidels such as the Zoroastrian Persians.

After his victory over the Persians, Heraclius returned to Constantinople which he entered in triumph in late 628. He left the capital again in 629 in order to integrate the reconquered regions into the empire and to enter into an alliance with Shahrbaraz, the Persian general. Part of the agreement with Shahrbaraz was the return of the relic of the Cross which the Persians had taken when they captured Jerusalem in 614. Viernmann discusses in chapter 6 the *restitutio crucis* in Jerusalem by Heraclius - one of the finest moments of his reign - putting into question recent scholarship with regard to the eschatological idea of the 'Endkaiser' and the idea that Heraclius deliberately presented himself as a new David. Viernmann argues convincingly that these notions were only developed later and that Heraclius in the first place intended to associate himself with Constantine under whose reign the *inventio crucis* took place. Like Constantine, Heraclius attempted, without much success, to create unity between the various Christian denominations in the east, a topic examined in the last part of the chapter. The final part of the chapter examines the expansion of the Arabs, the Roman defeat at the battle of Yarmouk (636) and Heraclius' return to Constantinople where resistance against his rule grew as exemplified by a conspiracy. The boat bridge over the Bosphorus by which he entered the capital in a spectacular procession is seen by Viernmann as a statement of triumph to sustain his reign instead of the result of Heraclius' fear of water as stated by the ninth-century author Nikephoros and accepted by most scholars.

Heraclius died of natural causes in 641. The last short chapter 7 examines the aftermath of Heraclius' rule. After initial conflicts about his succession between the offspring of his first wife Eudocia and his second spouse Martina, the Heraclian dynasty ruled until 711.

Viernmann has written a thorough monograph of Heraclius' reign in which she examines all possible aspects of his emperorship in a detailed way - sometimes somewhat too detailed to my taste. But perhaps the most important contribution of this study is how Heraclius

transformed imperial rule in a structural way. That makes Heraclius a crucial figure for understanding the sustainability of Roman imperial rule.

Notes :

[1] Both studies are reworkings of originally 'Doktorarbeiten' defended at Konstanz and Tübingen.

[2] Walter E. Kaegi: *Heraclius. Emperor of Byzantium* , Cambridge: CUP 2003.