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Karl Strobel, *Kaiser Traian. Eine Epoche der Weltgeschichte*, Regensburg, 2010, 479 p., 31 fig. and 3 maps.

Over the last two decades Trajan was the subject of many books,¹ such as J. Bennet's² and G. Seelentag's³ ones, or collected studies, such as the ones edited by E. Schallmayer,⁴ J. González,⁵ A. Nünnerich-Asmus,⁶ and J. Alvar and J. M. Blásquez.⁷ Here are also to be mentioned the collected studies published in Romania, in 2006, marking the 1900 years since the creation of the Dacia province.⁸ Nevertheless, this large amount of publications does not replace a monograph on the subject. Bennet's approach has many shortcomings⁹ and

Seelentag mostly studies Trajan's constructed image.¹⁰ The collected studies have only highlighted different aspects of the reign of the emperor. A new monograph, which would be able to take into consideration the current state of knowledge on the subject, was very much needed. K. Strobel has fully accomplished the task. His acquaintance with the subject is known from his previous two excellent books on Domitian's and Trajan's Dacian wars¹¹ and from his many articles published in the past thirty years (many of them are cited in the book, therefore it is useless to provide a list here). The book is divided into seven chapters, further divided in subchapters.¹² It opens with an Introduction

¹ Not to mention the already old book published by E. Cizek, *L'époque de Trajan. Circonstances politiques et problèmes idéologiques*, Bucharest-Paris, 1983. A Romanian edition was published before, in 1980. For older approaches see the book here reviewed, p. 22-23.

² J. Bennet, *Trajan. Optimus princeps. A life and times*, London-New York, 1997. A second edition was published in 2001, in Bloogminton. A Romanian translation was also published in Bucharest, 2006 (translated by Vl. Agrigoroaiei).

³ G. Seelentag, *Taten und Tugenden Traians. Herrschaftsdarstellung im Prinzipat*, Stuttgart, 2004 (Hermes Einzelschriften 91).

⁴ E. Schallmayer (ed.), *Traian in Germanien – Traian im Reich*, Bad Homburg, 1999 (Saalburg Schriften 5).

⁵ J. González (ed.), *Traiano. Emperador de Roma*, Rome, 2000. See also other collected studies edited by the same J. González (ed.), *Imp. Caesar Nerva Traianus Aug.*, Sevilla, 1993.

⁶ A. Nünnerich-Asmus (ed.), *Traian. Ein Kaiser der Superlative am Beginn einer Umbruchzeit?*, Mainz, 2002.

⁷ J. Alvar, J. M. Blásquez (eds.), *Traiano*, Rome, 2010. See also the Spanish version published in Madrid, 2003.

⁸ E. S. Teodor, O. Țentea (eds.), *Dacia Augusti provincia. Crearea provinciei. Actele simpozionului desfășurat în 13-14 octombrie 2006 la Muzeul Național de Istorie a României*, Bucharest, 2006; D. Benea (ed.), *Simpozionul internațional Daci și Romani. 1900 de ani de la integrarea Daciei în Imperiul Roman (Timișoara, 24-26 martie 2006)*, Timișoara, 2006 (Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Universitatis Timisiensis VII); Fl. Matei-Popescu (ed.), *Romanitas Daco-Moesica*, in Dacia, N. S., 50, 2006, p. 77-429; I. Piso (ed.), *Die Römischen Provinzen. Begriff und Gründung (Colloquium Cluj-Napoca, 28. September-1. Oktober 2006)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2008.

⁹ See the review published by W. Eck, *Scripta Classica Israelica* 17, 1998, 231-234 (p. 234: "[e]ine

Durchsicht des Buches hat ergeben, daß an zahllosen Stellen ähnlich massive Mißverständnisse von Quellen und moderner Forschung festzustellen sind die das Buch generell unzuverlässig machen") and in the book here reviewed, p. 18-19 (p. 19: "Grundproblem ist, dass Bennett keinen sprachlichen Zugang zu den griechischen und lateinischen Quellen besitzt und auch die deutsche, französische und italienische Forschung offensichtlich nur ungenügend erfassen konnte").

¹⁰ Seelentag, *op. cit.*, p. 41: "Meine Studie ist kein Versuch einer Biographie Traians. Sie untersucht am Beispiel Regierung Traians das Phänomen der kaiserzeitlichen Herrschaftsdarstellung und betrachtet die Stabilität der politischen Ordnung im frühen römischen Principat als Folge eines ununterbrochenen Prozesses der Kommunikation".

¹¹ K. Strobel, *Untersuchungen zu den Dakerkriegen Trajans. Studien zur Geschichte des mittleren und unteren Donaupraumes in der hohen Kaiserzeit*, Bonn, 1984 (Antiquitas. Reihe 1. Abhandlungen zur Alten Geschichte 33); idem, *Die Donaukriege Domitians*, Bonn, 1989 (Antiquitas. Reihe 1. Abhandlungen zur Alten Geschichte 38). See also idem, *Die Eroberung Dakiens. Ein Resümee zum Forschungsstand der Dakerkriege Domitians und Traians*, Dacia, N. S., 50, 2006, p. 105-114.

¹² Here are the chapters: I. Welche neuer und noch nie gehörter Weg zur Herrschaft! (What a new and unheard way to power!, p. 36-138 – the title is taking from Pliny the Younger, *Pan.*, 7, 4-6: *O novum atque inauditum ad principatum iter*); II. Die Machtübernahme Traians (Trajan's assumption of power, p. 139-181); III. Die ersten Jahre des neuen Regime (The first years of the new regime, p. 182-217); IV. Der Weg zum Feldherrnruhm (The way to glory as military commander,

(p. 9-24) and with short review of the literature (under the title: *felicior Augusto – melior Traiano*, the famous passage from Aurelius Victor, *Caes.* 13, 2-3, p. 25-35), and it is closed by four appendices (p. 423-460),¹³ three maps (p. 461-463, a list of abbreviations (p. 464-465), an index (p. 466-478) and a list of the figures with acknowledgements (p. 479). Every subchapter has at its end a short bibliographic companion, which summarizes the debates and controversies, and the endnotes. The choosing of this type of the text layout is a compromise between the scholarship demanding and the openness to a wider audience, as the author claims: “[d]abei ist angestrebt, einen Mittelweg zwischen dem wissenschaftlichen Auditorium, den Erfordernissen der heutigen Studierenden und dem historisch interessierten Leser zu finden” (p. 19-20).

Since the Lower Danube area was in Trajan's attention for the almost first half of his reign, a large part of the book is dedicated to this period. As this is also one of the most debated topics in the Romanian historiography, and this journal has especially research interest in the mentioned area, many of my observations will focus on this.

K. Strobel has succeeded not only in tracing a plausible historical reconstruction, but also in dismantling many of the unrealistic theses assumed by various historians and archaeologists, especially from Romania.¹⁴ His criticism on the Romanian nationalistic approach of the ancient history is also well known, as he started, almost fifteen years ago, a debate on the use of the “Geto-Dacians” collocation in the Romanian historiography.¹⁵ At that moment, when the Romanian

p. 218-303); V. Der unbesiegbare und göttergleiche Kaiser (The undefeated and the godlike Emperor, p. 304-347); VI. Das Abenteuer des Partherkrieges (The adventure of the Parthian war, p. 348-398); VII. Der Nachfolger (The successor, p. 399-421).

¹³ Here are the appendices: Daker und Geten (Dacians and Getae, p. 422-433); Bemerkungen zur Münzprägung Traians (Observations on Trajan's coins minting, p. 434-440); Das Heerscherporträt Traians (Trajan's portrait as ruler, p. 441-453); Der Panegyricus des Plinius in der jüngeren Forschung (Pliny's panegyricus in the recent research, p. 454-460).

¹⁴ See for example the criticism (p. 230-231) on the book published by A.-S. Ștefan, *Les guerres daciques de Domitien et de Trajan. Architecture militaire, topographie, images et histoire*, Rome, 2005. The history of the Dacian wars begins with the history of the Getae from the seventh-fifth century BC (p. 359-363) and Decebalus' kingdom had Dniestr as a frontier in the East and the Carpathians Mountains from Slovakia in the West (p. 508), just to give two examples of the many shortcomings of Ștefan's book.

¹⁵ K. Strobel, *Despre complexitatea mărimilor etnice, politice și culturale ale istoriei spațiului Dunării de Jos* [On the complexity of the ethnic, political and cultural

historiography tried to find a new path after the fall of the Communism, it was a very much expected criticism, although not welcomed by everyone.¹⁶

In this book, the author strongly argues against another very much cherished idea of the Romanian historiography, namely the dynastic continuity in the Dacian kingdom, in the south-western Transylvania, from Burebista to Decebalus (p. 229-230). There are no available sources to sustain such a continuity and, above all, the centre of the Burebista (a Getic king and not a Dacian one – see Strabo, 7, 3, 5 and 3, 11) kingdom must be search in another area, namely in the south-eastern part of the today Romania.

The Dacian conflict was opened by Domitian (as a response to a Dacian attack on Moesia province, in the year of 85¹⁷) and closed by Trajan. Almost twenty years of diplomatic and military unrest were solved by the foundation of a new province, which lasted more than a century and a half. This was Trajan's long lasting achievement by the Lower Danube.¹⁸ Despite the regime change, Nerva¹⁹ and thereafter

entities of the history of the Lower Danube area], SCIVA 49, 1998, 1, p. 61-95 and 2, p. 207-227. See also p. 233-234 and 422-433. K. Strobel, *Die Frage der römischen Ethnogenese: Kontinuität – Diskontinuität im unteren Donauraum in Antike und Frühmittelalter*, Balkan-Archiv 2005-2006 (2009), p. 59-173 (non vidi) and Gh.-Al. Niculescu's ground breaking article: *Nationalism and the Representation of Romanian Archaeology*, Dacia, N. S. 58-59, 2004-2005, p. 99-124.

¹⁶ See for example Al. Vulpe, *Geto-dacii?*, CICSA. Buletinul Centrului de Istorie Comparată a Societăților Antice 1-2, 1998, p. 2-11, who argues in the favour of a simple convention. Nevertheless, this is not the case: Gh.-Al. Niculescu, *Nationalism and Representation of Society in Romanian Archaeology*, in *Nation and National Ideology. Past, Present and Prospects. Proceedings of the International Symposium held at the New Europe College, Bucharest April 6-7, 2001*, Bucharest 2002, p. 209-234 (especially p. 210-212).

¹⁷ See also Strobel, *Die Donaukriege Domitians*, p. 35-40. However, it is very difficult to sustain the author's opinion, p. 91: “Diurpaneus stand an der Spitze einer antirömischen Koalition von dakischen Stammesverbände und Fürsten vor allem in der Kleinen und Großen Walachei sowie in dem Gebiet zwischen Ostkarpaten und Pruth”, an opinion embraced by many historians in Romania, which lacks the support of any reliable sources, but was in favour because of its connection with the idea of the entire people fighting the aggressors, praised at the end of Communist regime.

¹⁸ For the preliminaries of the organization of the Dacia province see I. Piso, *Les débuts de la province de Dacie*, in idem (ed.), *Die Römischen Provinzen. Begriff und Gründung (Colloquium Cluj-Napoca, 28. September-1. Oktober 2006)*, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 297-331.

¹⁹ On the circumstances of Domitian's assassination and Nerva's accession to power see in the second

Trajan²⁰ continued Domitian's policy, since there are now many arguments in favour of a new expedition prepared against the Germanic tribes, on the Pannonian frontier, and against the Dacians.²¹ The war on the Marcomanni and Quadi was in fact carried on in the year 97, with Nerva still alive (p. 155-156), and in autumn of 98 Trajan, already emperor, reached Moesia Superior in order to supervise new military constructions of different types, as the epigraphic documents fully attest (p. 190-191).

The Dacian expeditions are in full reconstructed by the author (p. 236-289). Here I only want to highlight that from the Roman point of view there was only one Dacian war (*bellum Dacicum*) with two *expeditiones Dacicae*²² (therefore Trajan probably wrote the *Commentarii de bello Dacico* and not *de bellis Dacicis*, as the author asserted, p. 236). Concerning Trajan's Column in Rome (a full description can be found at p. 320-323), the author is right in stressing the fact, despite a commonly spread idea, the column is not at all a "Dokumentarfilm" ("[e]s ist entscheiden, in dem Relieffries der Säule keine Bilderzählung im Sinne eines 'Dokumentarfilms' zu den *Commentarii Traians* zu sehen", p. 320), but a "Bildmedium" (p. 236-238), with horizontally and a vertical directions of reading. The column was an important part of the imperial propaganda and therefore it is useless as historic source in the reconstruction of the Dacian war details. The entire representation is stereotype and selective, using

chapter of this book, p. 140-150. See also J. D. Grainger, *Nerva and the Roman Succession Crisis of AD 96-99*, London-New York, 2003 and A. W. Collins, *The Palace Revolution: The Assassination of Domitian and the Accession of Nerva*, Phoenix 63, 2009, p. 73-106, with the complete bibliography.

²⁰ For Trajan's adoption by Nerva and his accession to power see in this book p. 156-174. See also W. Eck, *Traian – Der Weg zum Kaisertum*, in A. Nünnerich-Asmus (ed.), *Traian. Ein Kaiseer der Superlative am Beginn einer Umbruchzeit?*, Mainz, 2002, p. 7-20.

²¹ See my article *The Auxiliary Units from Moesia Superior in Domitian's time and the Problem of CIL XVI 41*, *Ephemeris Napocensis* 16-17, 2006-1007, p. 31-48. K. Strobel has rejected my idea that *Iulius Candidus Marius Celsus* should have been governor of Moesia Superior in the CIL XVI 41 (p. 180, note 66). Nevertheless, newly published documents back up my assumption: W. Eck, A. Pangerl, *Verdienste um Kaiser und Reich? Zu einem Diploma aus der Regierungszeit Nervas mit dem Statthalter Iulius C[andidus Marius Celsus]*, *ZPE* 177, 2011, p. 259-262. See also P. Weiß, *Statthalter und Konsulndaten in neuen Militärdiplomen*, *ZPE* 171, 2009, p. 231-235, no. 1.

²² See the entire discussion by V. Rosenberger, *Bella et expeditiones. Die antike Terminologie der Kriege Roms*, Stuttgart, 1992 (HABES 12), p. 92-94.

both a sequential and a non-sequential logic. Therefore it cannot be understood as a strictly chronological historical discourse, as many modern historians have attempted. We must not also forget that the column was only a part of an architectural complex, dominated by the military iconography (p. 317-318),²³ constructed *ex manubiis*.²⁴ The only goal was to glorify the emperor and his army²⁵ and to be a symbol of his apotheosis.²⁶

On specific details, I disagree with the author only regarding the scene IX (C. Cichorius), which has nothing to do with the episode transmitted by Cassius Dio (68, 8, 1) in which one of the Decebalus allies, namely the Germanic tribe of *Buri*, sent an embassy to the emperor with a message written on a large mushroom (p. 244). This was a typical *omen victoriae*, part of the schema: scene VIII – *lustratio*, scene IX – *omen victoriae*, scene X – *adlocutio*. The scene could be also part of a vertical reading: scene IX – *omen victoriae*, scene LXXVIII – goddess Victoria, scene XLIV – Decebalus' suicide²⁷ (a vertical schema also taken into consideration by the author, ignoring scene IX: "[e]ine andere Achse ordnet die Deditio-Szenen einander zu, in einer finden wir die Victoria-Darstellung, welche die Erzählung der beiden Kriege trennt, die Donaubrücke von Drobeta, die Erbeutung des

²³ P. Zanker, *Das Trajansforum als Monument imperialer Selbstdarstellung*, *ArchAnz* 85, 1970, p. 499-544; Seelentag, *op. cit.*, p. 319-321, 396-397 and 408.

²⁴ Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 13, 25, 1: *in fastigiis fori Traiani simulacra sunt sita circumundique inaurata equorum atque signorum militarium, subscriptumque est ex manubiis*. For a commentary see Seelentag, *op. cit.*, p. 366-368.

²⁵ As the author argued, p. 241: "[i]m Mittelpunkt aller programmatischen Aspekte des Relieffrieses steht, in Manifestation der kaiserlichen Herrscherideologie, die Gestalt des Kaisers, auf die als Zentrum des agierenden römischen Heeres alles Geschehen und alle Entscheidungen konzentriert sind. Das Heer bildet das machtvolle und ergebene Instrument, mit dem Traian als wahrer Imperator, als alles beherrschender kaiserlicher Oberbefehlshaber, seine überragenden Erfolge erringt, durch die er weit über menschliches Maß hinausgehoben wird, wie die Säule als Heroisierungsmemorial vermitteln sollte".

²⁶ Seelentag, *op. cit.*, p. 399-406. See also in this book, p. 320-323.

²⁷ L. Marinescu-Nicolajsen, *La colone trajane: le tryptique de la victoire. Contribution à une nouvelle interpretation de la scène IX*, *MEFRA* 111, 1999, 1, p. 273-310. See also into this direction S. Settis, *La colone trajane: invention, composition, disposition*, *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 40, 1985, 5, p. 1151-1194.

Schatzes des Decebalus und den Selbstmord des Dakerkönigs” p. 322).

At the end of the first *expeditio Dacica* the conquered territory was added to the Moesia Superior province in the south-west (probably in the form of independent military district, as the author asserts, p. 254, although the auxiliary units transferred directly from Pannonia at the beginning of the expedition, which thereafter will be part of the Dacia province army, were enlisted among the auxiliary units from Moesia Superior in the military diplomas²⁸) and to the Moesia Inferior province in the south-east (a situation that will last until the first years of the reign of Hadrian). A most important question arises here: had Trajan in mind to transform the Dacian kingdom into a Roman province when left Rome in March 101? The historiography until now admitted that Trajan wanted from the very beginning to create a new province at the north of the Danube and the peace from 102 was only a “compromise peace” (p. 255). Nevertheless, there are arguments against this common assumption. The most important one is the fact that Trajan signed a peace treaty and celebrated his triumph on the defeated enemy, in December 102 (this will only prove later wrong, Pliny the Younger, *Ep.*, 8, 4, 2: *actos bis triumphos, quorum alter ex invicta gente primus, alter novissimus fuit*). The second one is the territorial settling, with the territory south of the Carpathian Mountains already part of the two provinces of Moesia (the legions and auxiliaries were already in garrison in important strategic points, such as the legionary fortress on the same place as the future *colonia Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, p. 267-268, 280),²⁹ the eventual strategic goals of the war had been fully accomplished³⁰ (from this territories Trajan recruited in 104 at least one

Dacian cohort, *I Ulpia Dacorum*³¹). The third one is, following the very fragmented report of Cassius Dio (68, 10, 3-4), that Decebalus is to blame for the second Dacian expedition. He was the one who by capturing Longinus and requesting to have back the territory obliged the Senate to reopen the hostilities (Cassius Dio 68, 12, 1-4). The image that the primary goal of the Dacian war had been the making of a new Roman province was probably promoted by the emperor himself and by his closer advisers, as it would have look embarrassing to have a triumph on an undefeated enemy (the above cited passage from Pliny attests that there were such rumors in Rome), just like in the case of Domitian, blamed for that in the propaganda of the new regime (as the author also asserts, p. 259: “[a]uch der erste Dakertriumph Traians war damit nach den strengen römischen Wertmaßstäben ein zu Unrecht gefeierter, ein falscher Triumph. Die ganze Litanei der Vorwürfe gegen die falschen Siege und unwürdigen Triumphe Domitians konnte man im Grunde also gegen Traian anwenden”). At the same time, we must not forget that from the year 89, Decebalus was a client king, at the full disposal of the Roman emperor.³² Just like in the case of Arabia and Armenia (former vassal kingdoms, transformed in Roman provinces in 106 and in 114), the emperor had the right to decide whether to leave the territory under the authority of a local ruler or to send a Roman governor.³³ However, Trajan decision to create a new province at the Lower Danube is a major break of the tradition established by Augustus. Therefore, the above raised questions on Trajan’s primary aims regarding the Dacian kingdom still beg for answers, and it is the hope that future researches will give us new insights.

In sum, as I already asserted, K. Strobel has fully accomplished the task of writing a fascinating monograph on Trajan. The style is very attractive, the sources of all kind are critically presented, as well as the modern historiography, giving orientation to important moments and aspects of Trajan reign. Few could have been taken into consideration in this review; there are plenty to be discovered by the reader, such as Trajan’s dynastic policy, his great care for the children of Italy, the constructive activity in Rome, or the Parthian expedition and its great failure.

Floriant Matei-Popescu

²⁸ Fl. Matei-Popescu, O. Țentea, *Participation of the Auxiliary Troops from Moesia Superior in Trajan’s Dacian War*, Dacia N. S. 50, 2006, p. 127-140.

²⁹ For the recent published excavations from the *forum vetus* of Sarmizegetusa see R. Étienne, I. Piso, Al. Diaconescu, *Les fouilles dans le “forum vetus” de Sarmizegetusa. Rapport general*, AMN 39-40/I, 2002-2003 (2004), p. 59-154; I. Piso, *Le forum vetus de Sarmizegetusa*, Colonia Dacica Sarmizegetusa 1, Bucharest, 2006.

³⁰ See already in this direction H. Wolff, *Die römische Erschliessung der Rhein- und Donauprovinzen im Blickwinkel ihrer Zielsetzung*, in R. Frei-Stolba, M. A. Speidel (eds.), *Römische Inschriften – Neufunde, Neulesungen und Neuinterpretationen. Festschrift für Hans Lieb zum 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Freunden und Kollegen*, Basel-Berlin, 1995, p. 316-317.

³¹ D. Dana, Fl. Matei-Popescu, *Soldats d’origine dace dans les diplômes militaires*, Chiron 39, 2009, p. 236-237.

³² Strobel, *Die Donaukriege Domitians*, p. 89-95.

³³ See the full discussion by M. A. Speidel, *Belicosissimus princeps*, in A. Nünnerich-Asmus (ed.), *Traian. Ein Kaiser der Superlative am Beginn einer Umbruchzeit?*, Mainz, 2002, p. 29-31 (= *Heer und Herrschaft im römischen Reich der hohen Kaiserzeit*, Stuttgart, 2009, Mavors 16, p. 137-140).