

preservation of their disparate origins' (93–4) and formulates 'a coherent approach to incorporating, and acknowledging, the Greek past' (108).

Readers will naturally find some arguments more compelling than others. Every so often the suspicion arises that a new contextualisation simply reassembles the whole without bringing any new relationships to light, that this or that piece of artwork has simply been placed under the sign of connectivity, or merely used as a starting point for a wide-ranging rehearsal of current themes. This reader most enjoyed the more provocative chapters. The issue of metatextuality appears in the chapters of Haimson Lushkov and Nichols. Should we read late Republican and early imperial prose as self-consciously appropriative, or might some cite, imitate, quote and epitomise in a way that is naïve about power structures, if not entirely innocent of them? There is more to be teased out here, perhaps.

What about the collection's central claims? For there are central claims that run through the volume and go beyond a preference for a vocabulary that emphasises changes of ownership, sometimes violent ones. That preference is not trivial. Appropriation is an improvement on influence, borrowing or reference. Allusion and intertext have often seemed gentle, even genteel, modes of connection, youth acknowledging its debt to the old, even as it seeks to displace them. Appropriation and plunder have the advantage of acknowledging the inequalities of power involved. Horace can quip about captive Greece taking possession of its savage conqueror precisely because the reverse was true, and he quips in Latin for the new masters of the world.

Some essays also find the limits of Appropriation, too. Parker's discussion of the history of the Lateran obelisk evokes the progressive loss of the past through successive appropriations, a point Robert Nelson had made about the horses of San Marco in Venice. Appropriation is most vivid in the moment of transaction. Thereafter forgetfulness dulls its edge until the horses are only a sign for Venice. Daniels, in one of the most thought-provoking contributions, takes this even further (260):

A monolithic, centralizing notion of 'appropriation' will not fly given the Mediterranean world presented in this chapter and the other chapters in this section - a world of multidirectional networks along which people, goods, ideas and meanings were always on the move. Appropriation, the art of 'making something one's own', may imply to some a static end point or insinuate unidirectional power dynamics, yet it is clear that the cargoes appropriated by Rome never ceased to be part of the mobile Mediterranean.

Can we consider Rome a cargo culture, then, or the *imperium Romanum* an Empire of Plunder, if appropriative acts are constantly dissipated by the ebb and flow of populations and artifacts? Not if Roman culture is imagined as an authoritarian civilisational order of things. But if Roman culture describes a field of action, or even the constant contestations of practice and ownership that take place in and shape that field, then there is a lot to be said for the approaches advocated by the contributors to this volume, and especially its editors.

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ANDY MERRILLS, *ROMAN GEOGRAPHIES OF THE NILE: FROM THE LATE REPUBLIC TO THE EARLY EMPIRE*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xvi + 338, illus., plans. ISBN 9781107177284. £90.00.

Andy Merrills' book forms part of a recent vein of scholarship that looks anew at Roman representations of Egypt. Several key studies have focused on Nilotic landscapes as reflective of attitudes toward the space, place, and culture of Egypt (e.g. M. J. Versluys, *Aegyptiaca Romana: Nilotic Scenes and the Roman Views of Egypt* (2001); C. Barrett, *Domesticating Empire: Egyptian Landscapes in Pompeian Gardens* (2019)). While M. also engages with this well-trodden body of evidence, his expertise in geographical literature allows him to survey it from a fresh vantage point. Indeed, M. states that he was drawn to the Nile not because of specific questions about the river system, but because Roman interest in it ('almost forensic scrutiny', 16) was so great that the

Nile can be used as a case study better to understand Roman geographical thought more broadly. His goal is to complicate the influential but, he suggests, outdated approach to historical geography pioneered by Claude Nicolet, to reveal a more diverse and less political way of thinking about and describing the world.

Ch. 1 begins with the so-called map of Agrippa, which, though it probably did not include the Nile, is pivotal to understanding historical geography. M. offers a useful caution against over-reading the scanty evidence. To replace interpretations that read the map as akin to an archive, resulting from and projecting imperial ideologies, M. suggests that we employ the ‘art and text’ approach prevalent in recent studies of material culture: if there is a single thing we know of the map, it is that it was on public display in the Porticus Vipsania, open to viewers’ variable interpretations. The rest of the chapter turns to a text, Vitruvius, and an artwork, the Nile Mosaic from Palestrina.

Although the responses that M. reconstructs are based upon literary sources, and thus chiefly reflect elite attitudes, he turns to the issue of popular reception in ch. 2. Here M. discusses how the spectacle of the triumph introduced geography to the masses. He explores the common metaphor of the personified river, and his point that sculptural representations of rivers — the Nile, the Tigris, the Rhine — were rather generic is well taken. Crowds readily understood that rivers symbolised far-off places and imperial conquests, but had less interest in differentiating between them. In ch. 3, M. focuses on several contexts in Pompeii with Nilotic landscapes. His discussion is readable and useful. He argues that those examples that were large-scale and immersive (compared to small-scale vignettes) ‘forced the spectator to reflect on his own position as a viewer’ (128), reinforcing the perspective of a person at the top of the socio-political hierarchy. M. is to be commended, too, for asking how women and slaves might have responded to the imagery, at once invited to share in what M. terms the ‘managerial gaze’ (138), while also distanced from the leisure and control that gaze implied.

Ch. 4 shifts to the question of how knowledge of the Nile figured into metaphysical discourses — principally philosophical (Lucretius, Seneca, Plutarch), but also ritual, explored through discussion of the sanctuary of Isis in Pompeii. Much of the argument of that case study hangs upon a small building in the courtyard, which housed a subterranean cistern that M. argues (following Robert Wild, *Water in the Cultic Worship of Isis and Sarapis* (1981)) would have provided symbolic Nile water for use in ceremonies, because it would have been liable to overflow during heavy rains. Although there is much to appreciate in M.’s erudite treatment of the texts and also the sanctuary’s paintings (where images of the river abound), the discussion of ritual and belief is less balanced. The local cult may well have used water from the cistern in their rituals, but the argument regarding its function would have been stronger if it had relied on more robust documentation. M. might also have looked farther afield to the extensive evidence for other sites associated with Isis and Serapis around the empire, painstakingly documented over the last few decades. Well preserved though it is, the sanctuary in Pompeii does not represent the diversity of belief and practice in the Isiac cults, and cannot alone provide an adequate counterpoint to philosophical texts that range from the first century B.C.E to the second century C.E.

Chs 5 and 6 return to M.’s special area of expertise: the relationship between literature and scientific knowledge about geography. In ch. 5, M. shows that even as itineraries were intended to inform their readers, they also simplified geographical knowledge, with the result that specific sites and landmarks could slip out of place, appearing in different orders according to the agenda of the account. In ch. 6, he shows how poets exploited geographical knowledge, translating ‘the confusing geography of the world into a convenient imperial grammar’ (277).

All in all, M. succeeds in offering a rich example of a new way to write historical geography, rejecting monolithic explanations in favour of complicated, multivalent understandings. The book is at its best when dealing with texts, but M. has done an admirable job of tracing the connections between literary and artistic representations, revealing how readers and writers, artists and viewers received and in turn disseminated knowledge about their world.

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