MATTHEW P. LOAR, CAROLYN MACDONALD and DAN-EL PADILLA PERALTA (EDS), *ROME, EMPIRE OF PLUNDER: THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 325, illus., maps, plans. ISBN 9781108418423. £90.00.

This volume originated in a conference entitled 'Cargo Culture: Literary and Material Appropriative Practice in Rome'. That might have been a better title for the book; after all, what empire has ever resisted the opportunity to plunder? Nor does the book treat all the exactions of indemnities and tribute, of grain, and oil, animals and slaves and so much else through which the powerful in Rome sustained and profited from empire (although these are not forgotten, and provide a kind of backdrop in some chapters, notably Amy Richlin's tour de force 'The Traffic in Shtick', where comedy and the slave trade are productively re-entangled). But it is Appropriation that provides the connecting thematic for the papers that have been accumulated, arranged and displayed in this collection. Appropriation has itself, in the last thirty years, undergone a transformation from a daring creative mode — one that could be compared to Fusion-Cuisine — to something more sinister, the processes by which the powerful pick and choose from the cultural productions of the subordinated, repurposing them to serve new ends within hegemonic discourses of domination and universalism. Robert Nelson is the theorist of appropriation most often cited. For Nelson, appropriation consists of violent processes that actively select, remove, transport and distort the meaning of its objects in new places and contexts. Such processes are the focus of this volume and its central claim that 'In the exercise of empire, Rome *became* a culture of cargo' (7).

Literature and art (to use two problematic categories) are at the centre of analysis: this book is about how elites robbed other elites, and how one tyrant city humbled the great cities and sanctuaries of earlier ages. Some papers stress the involvements of various social classes: the soldiers that won the booty, the slaves that made so many of the objects, the citizen audiences of Roman drama as well as aristocratic generals and imperial curators. But in the end it is Culture with a capital C that is the centre of attention. Geographically, most of the action takes place in Rome itself, and the chronological fulcrum is the last two centuries B.C.E. and the Augustan Principate. Appropriately enough, tendrils of investigation and narrative extend much further in time and space, occasionally to include modern appropriations. But Roman imperialism provides the master-context. Empire drew products and producers to the centre, where both were given new places in new political and cosmological orders: the stresses and strains generated and felt elsewhere are not neglected.

Most chapters pursue this agenda through case studies ('microhistories', as Loar puts it; 'cultural biographies' would in many cases have been equally appropriate). Most comprise nuanced close-readings and thick descriptions of artefacts for which plenty of context can be supplied. The catalogue (in brief) comprises Basil Dufallo on Plautus' *Menaechmi*, Ayelet Haimson Lushkov on Livy, Thomas Biggs on the naval monuments of Agrippa and Augustus, Stefano Rebeggiani on Pergamene Gauls, Marden Fitzpatrick Nichols on Vitruvius, Jennifer Trimble on the Ara Pacis, Grant Parker on the Lateran obelisk, Richlin on comedians, Carrie Fulton on shipwrecks carrying art work in their cargoes, Micah Y. Myers on the Gallus papyrus and Megan Daniels on Hercules/Melqart in Iberia. These eleven case studies are complemented by three editorial interventions, concluding sections entitled Interaction, Distortion and Circulation. The editors have done an excellent job in promoting connectivity: the chapters frequently refer to each other and use a shared language of interpretation. Although they derive from various traditions — the editors single out discussions over allusion and intertext in Latin literature and on Hellenisation in classical archaeology — they have been re-assembled into an enchanting whole, as if carefully arranged within a grand porticus or a temple precinct.

These chapters stand perfectly well alone, and most readers will approach them this way. Who (apart from reviewers) reads entire collections today? The best chapters find new connections between objects and people that were not apparent before. Biggs' discussion of how C. Duilius' Punic War monuments inform those created after Naulochus in 36 and Actium in 31 B.C.E. provides a new strand to the history of triumphal art. Trimble's suggestion that the Ara Pacis may be seen as an appropriation of the peripteral jubilee chapels of the New Kingdom will interest those writing about Roman *Égyptomanie* and also scholars of Augustan Rome. Others engage interestingly with recent scholarship: so Nichols builds on Wallace-Hadrill's account of Vitruvius to argue that the *De Architectura* 'relies on a definition of Romanness as self consciously composite, distinguished not only by its absorption of foreign elements, but also by enduring

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.

Institute of Classical Studies, University of London GREG WOOLF
greg.woolf@sas.ac.uk
doi:10.1017/S0075435820000398

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