

Eric H. Cline and Mark W. Graham, *Ancient Empires: From Mesopotamia to the Rise of Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xv + 368. ISBN 978-0-88911-7 (Hardback, \$99), ISBN 978-0-521-71780-9 (Paperback, \$50).

Ancient Empires challenges the reader to think on a scale that is seldom found today in academic books. Clearly a book of but 345 pages cannot be a history of the entire ancient world, and the authors make no claim that *Ancient Empires* is. Rather this book is an extended conceptual essay that tries to elucidate how actual events relate to major historical forces and how these in turn are held together by supra-regional approaches to governance (the creation and spread of empires). Striking a balance of recalling events, explaining why they occurred in sufficient historical detail to build upon, and finally linking events and historical causation into an analytic structure is a major challenge and one that, in general, is well met.

The book focuses on a clear set of interlocking aspects about ancient empires and imperialism, and in so doing it raises timeless questions about the connections among the authors' four basic lines of analysis: ideology, economics, military, and politics, or IEMP, an acronym found throughout the text. Each of the four components of IEMP has its substructures that can rise up to alter the overall balance. For example, environmental factors played transformative roles during rapid climatic changes and the resulting changes were first apparent in the economy. Another example is the creative use of the past, real or contrived, that was a component of all ancient imperial ideologies. According to the authors, the creation of the first ancient Empire created an "irreversible fact" to which all other ancient peoples had to respond (p. 53). *Ancient Empires* offers much to ponder. Do not empires, reactions to them and perceptions of them continue to shape our world today?

The first hurdle to be surmounted in the book is that of providing a workable definition of the key terms and concepts used throughout the book, beginning with imperialism itself. In this the authors acknowledge their indebtedness to others, notably to M.W. Doyle (empire as the interaction between two polities, one primary, the other secondary) and M. Mann (IEMP as comprising the basic elements of socio-political power). There is no attempt to prioritize one of the IEMP as first or foremost, as opposed to those who still follow Gordon Childe (1892–1957), whose categorizations of early civilization still echo in the teaching of history.

The age of ancient empires began, for the authors, with the Neo-Assyrians in the eighth century BCE and ended with the Umayyad (661–750 CE) "the first Islamic and the last Ancient Empire", but both of these built their empires upon imperial precedents already thousands of years in the making. Most ancient empires had a divine or divinely connected kingship as a central ideological element. Exceptions, notably those of the Athenians and the Romans of the Republic, substituted different values for the ideology of divine kingship. Classical Athenians rejected kingship in favor of a political distillation of "freedom and citizenship". Early Romans resented the idea of kingship, in part because their creation myth was built upon legends of their overthrowing it.

They instead united around family, citizenship and holding public office, bound together by patronage, both foreign and domestic. With Augustus's defeat of his last competitor for supreme power in 31 BCE, Rome accelerated its drift towards divine kingship, which continued throughout the remainder of Roman history, despite the triumph of Christianity in the fourth century CE. Those who resisted ancient Empires typically adopted the same ideological vocabulary of divine or divinely inspired kingship as the primary imperial power, or, as in the case of the Jews, substituted a cultural or religious ideology as the centerpiece in their search for unity and survival.

The most fruitful approach to empire offered in *Ancient Empires* is that of exploring the reasons and strategies for resistance to imperialism, that is, the study of groups that were either formed or redefined in order to resist the primary power. Challengers to universal dominion, the authors reveal, produced a great many of longest-lasting contributions of ancient societies. While resisting the advance of a primary empire, some of the resisters evolved into empires themselves, secondary empires: the Athenians (contra Persia), the early Romans (contra Etruscans). Successful empires overwhelmingly produced our records, whereas those resisting are much less historically well served. When possible, the authors attempt to overcome the sparse literary record of those not having access to means of official propaganda and the archival practices of a primary empire by careful use of non-literary evidence such as archaeology and the surviving pieces of monumental architecture to reveal cultural reaction, interaction and mutual borrowing.

The only literary tradition independent of the primary power that has survived in relative quantity from the ancient near eastern world is that of the Jews, whose long and successful resistance to outside domination and its significance to their history comes up for analysis regularly. Examining the Jewish tradition as one of resistance is augmented in each instance by exploring the circumstances of at least one other group: the Urartu and Phoenicians to the Assyrians; Greeks to the Persians; barbarians, Palmyrenes and Ethiopians to the Romans and Sassanids; and finally the Umayyads to Byzantines and Sassanids. Typically successful resistance meant maintaining a geographic and/or cultural independence. The Urartu of the Iranian plateau and Aksumite Ethiopians were particularly successful at the former: the Jews at the latter.

The authors reveal that ancient empires not only shared common tendencies in their deployment of IEMP, but also in some of their specific approaches to governance. Imperial conquerors were at once faced with the problem of what to do with those who had fought against them. Most annihilated the defeated, killing or enslaving the elite and their families and replacing them with their own people, but some, notably the Romans, according to the authors, co-opted the conquered elites. In every case, the conquerors and the conquered entered into a period, often many centuries in duration, of sharing components of their culture. Several examples reveal that something as central as language need not derive from the conquerors, but rather can arise from the defeated indigenous majority. A case in point is that of Aramaic, which became the *lingua franca* under the Neo-Assyrians and remained so long after the Assyrians had been forgotten.

To this reader, the authors are most successful when discussing the Assyrian Empire and least when examining the Roman. There is simply too much emphasis on events and internal historical development in the Roman section, which occupies much of the book (pp.173–318), so much so that the exploration of IEMP and imperialism is marginalized. The classical Greek world is nicely juxtaposed to the Near Eastern, and the Alexandrian and post-Alexandrian kingdoms serve to bridge the two, returning the ancient Mediterranean world to traditional imperialism with divinely connected kingship and cultural symbiosis with the native populations. This is not a book for those wanting to delve into early Islam, but there is much to think about when reading of the Umayyads' early experiments with cultural borrowing.

Like polished orators, the authors have left the audience wanting more. More might have included occasional discussion of the impact of technology. For example, the use of iron is said to have helped the Hittite and Assyrian empires to conquer far beyond their homelands and was much more abundant than the ingredient needed to make bronze, but the authors fail to note that iron is much more difficult to work, requiring much higher heats of forging than bronze. What the Phoenicians were able to do was provide weapons and tools that went far beyond just smelting iron ore into wrought iron. One might also desire a fuller treatment, or at least a mention, of the policies of the Seleucid king, Antiochus III (c. 242–187 BCE) towards native populations, especially the Jews, rather than settle for those of his son, who forced the Jews to revolt under the Maccabees. The father's policies of acceptance and accommodation were more typical of Near Eastern imperialism and formed a backdrop to the highly successful and similar Roman policies towards the conquered. Similarly, it is surprising that no mention is made of the role of auxiliary troops in the Roman Empire, since upon discharge they received citizenship and were the bedrock of Roman success in the provinces. Christianity not only took over the Empire, but a case might have been made that it was itself transformed in the process, and so it too could be called a secondary empire of sorts. Probably every expert reader will find something left unsaid.

In summary, this is a stimulating essay, one that rewards a careful reader with new insights into a variety of issues. The maps are useful and readable; other illustrative material is always clearly integrated into the narrative and appropriately placed in the text. The suggested readings are arranged by chapter and carefully selected to support and expand upon the discussions in the text. The keyword index is composed entirely of proper and foreign names and is therefore of limited assistance. *Ancient Empires* should assist academic readers, in general not just specialists in the ancient world, in posing better questions in their own work. Better questions, like those raised in *Ancient Empires*, yield better research.

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