

Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne and John Weisweiler, eds., *Cosmopolitanism and Empire. Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*. Oxford Studies in Early Empires, Oxford University Press, New York NY, 2016, pp. xi + 282. ISBN 978-0-19-046566-7, hb.

Cosmopolitanism, loosely defined as cultural interactivity among geographically and ethnically diverse population groups, might seem a self-evident feature of polyglot land empires in history. In this stimulating volume experts take a more focused position by exploring cosmopolitanism as a tool of ancient empires, from the Assyrians via the Seleucids and Ptolemies to the Romans and Sasanians. Alexander comes up in the discussions but is not specifically addressed despite being the obvious pin-up for imperial cosmopolitanism in antiquity, although Peter Fibiger Bang (p. 233) suggests how the ancient literary tradition might be exploited, “to lay bear [the] conflicts and inconsistencies” obstructing ancient universalisms in practice.

Born out of a sequence of academic meetings beginning in Cambridge (UK) and ending in Chicago, the project required the three co-editors to define their terms. Here (p. 1) cosmopolitanism is theorised as a form of politics aimed at the local elites on whom the ruling groups of empires relied, taking the form of either assimilation (“eliding the cultural differences between universal rulers and local elites”) or subordination (this “operates by recognising, preserving and organising [cultural] difference”). Ancient historians accept that most if not all of the states in question relied to a greater or lesser extent on collaboration with local elites to control and to tax their subjects. In viewing their subject matter through the prism of cosmopolitanism thus defined, this set of papers successfully defamiliarises an aspect of ancient imperialism. As for the focus on elite culture, there is no apology for this, nor is one needed given the dynamics of ancient empires. That said, this reviewer for one would have welcomed, from such an intellectually impressive roster of contributors, an explicit rationale for this concentration on just one stratum of society as a means to understanding the whole.

The editors usefully include a “short history of cosmopolitan politics in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean” (pp. 12–27) which serves as a partial summary of the contributions that follow. This review limits itself to commenting on what its author found particularly engaging or, occasionally, problematic.

Seth Richardson’s paper draws attention to the contribution to building a cosmopolitan identity of royal gifts of apparel by the Assyrian kings to their elites: an early manifestation, if not the earliest, of the monarchical use of dress as a mark of favour (in Assyrian terms, of royal “confidence”). Kathryn Stevens uses cuneiform and Greek inscriptions to examine how and why local elites in Hellenistic times in both Seleucid Mesopotamia and the Greek world to the west invested in constructing links between a prestigious local past and an “imperial” present (Seleucid, Ptolemaic etc.), as in the Lindos Chronicle, listing gifts to Athena Lindia from the earliest times down to the Ptolemies. She joins Clifford Ando in seeing in this kind of historicising

localism a trend fostered by the imperial power as a means “to distract conquered peoples from realising solidarity with each other around their subjugation.” (Here she quotes earlier work by Ando, who had in mind specifically the Romans.)

The same Hellenistic-period phenomenon is approached at a different angle by Johannes Haubold, who uses Berossus and an *Astronomical Diary* to argue that the Chaldean priests of Mesopotamia made a case for their religious exceptionality that the Seleucids seem to have accepted: hence “a rather more complex alliance of the local and the global” than the binary model of cosmopolitan politics adumbrated by the book’s editors (p. 101). Christelle Fischer-Bovet argues for something similar in examining Ptolemaic relations with Egyptian indigenes as revealed by the trilingual decrees of the Egyptian priesthood, where she highlights their assimilative elements including the adoption by the priests of a *polis*-style decree format: hence the usual view, that Egyptian local elites were “subordinated” by the Ptolemies, needs qualification.

In his paper Myles Lavan emphasises the sharp distinctions between the imperial (i.e. senatorial and equestrian) elite and the local elites of the early empire—perhaps too much so, given the many informal ties (patronal, social, familial) which made these two elite groups more interconnected in practice than the positions of imperial Latin literature might suggest. He argues—convincingly—that the provincials themselves, not the imperial centre, probably generated the traces of ecumenical language in communications between early Roman emperors and provinces. The evolution of this language during the third century is studied by John Weisweiler, who makes a persuasive case for an ideologically significant shift in epigraphic representations of imperial power when the language of Roman republican office (*trib. pot.* and all that) is displaced in honorific inscriptions for Roman emperors by an ecumenical rhetoric of “a monarch whose care extends indiscriminately to the ‘entire earth’”. He argues that a more universalist theory of empire was needed to support the hikes in tax of the later third and early fourth centuries, which in turn had placed a greater fiscal burden on imperial and local elites, who now needed ideological chivvyng. That said, one should not overlook other tendencies of the third century suggesting a more broad-based move towards imperial universalism: the *constitutio Antoniniana*, obviously, but also the mid-century surfacing of a “religion of empire” (see J. Rives on the edict of Decius in *JRS* 1999).

Sandwiched between these two papers Clifford Ando’s bracing essay on the Roman citizenship frames its history rather differently from the usual “emancipatory” story. He gives a timely reminder that Romans viewed “Roman” status as something acquired solely by the juridical process of becoming a Roman citizen, rather than through any process of cultural “Romanization”. Insofar as the acquisition by provincials of Roman citizenship came to create an elite class in the provinces that was both local and supra-local, he also stresses the paradox that the non-Roman citizen-bodies of western *municipia* were effectively empowered to make Roman citizens themselves, since Roman municipal law allowed them to elect the local

magistrates who in turn were entitled to Roman citizenship on leaving office. A teleological view of the Roman citizenship is therefore a trap: “citizenship fulfilled radically different functions in different periods of Roman history” (p. 169).

Richard Payne discusses how Sasanian monarchs used a “cosmopolitan” practice, the Graeco-Roman tradition of face-to-face disputation, to arbitrate and “subordinate” religious sectarianism among their Christian elites while leaving intact the politically dominant position of the Zoroastrian ruling group. In a final overview, the comparative historian Peter Fibiger Bang tries to relate the themes of the book to “the revival of empire and cosmopolitan thought” in the twenty-first century, with reference to America, Europe and China. In part this is a worthy attempt at contemporary relevance, and it was bad luck on the author that the election of Mr Trump and the British referendum on leaving the European Union together suggest that this revival is less marked than it might have seemed when the book went to press.

In all, the editors should be congratulated on identifying a rewarding standpoint from which to view ancient imperialisms afresh. Putting together a collaborative volume with a tight thematic focus is not necessarily an easy job. They have done well in imposing a tight discipline on their contributors, as have the latter in sticking to their brief. Everyone interested in ancient empires, as well as ancient monarchies and courts, will need to take note of this book, which should also interest students of cosmopolitanism *tout court*, including those who approach the subject under the guise of other –isms (I am thinking especially of David Cannadine’s *Ornamentalism. How the British Saw their Empire* (Allen Lane 2001), a book which deserves to be better known among ancient historians).

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