

Benjamin Henri Isaac, *Empire and Ideology in the Graeco-Roman World: Selected Papers*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. ix, 372. ISBN 9781107135895. £90.00.

This is a collection of 17 papers written by Benjamin Isaac, mostly previously published (though generally revised) between 1998 and 2014. Isaac has chosen a broad approach in tracing his themes of Empire and Ideology. Though mostly interested in the Roman Empire of the first to third centuries AD, he is curious about how earlier Greek societies handled some of these themes. Topics include discussions of the Roman army, core-periphery, racism, the term 'barbarian', Latin in the East, nomads, Hatra, and multi-culturalism, wide ranging and frequently thought provoking. There is a brief introduction, one map (no plates or figures), a bibliography (though all papers contain full secondary source citations in the footnotes), and an index.

In general, the methodology is to start with modern assumptions about a phenomenon, then to show some of the issues with these assumptions. Since some of these papers reflect work related to the themes of Isaac's *Racism in Antiquity* (2004), there is a little overlap with this important book. Finally, there seemed to be more of a focus on change over time than of change over space so that phrases like 'the Greeks' and 'the Romans' recur regularly. Using shorthands like this allows the discussion to move rapidly, and Isaac is aware of the simplification and selectivity in doing so, but undergraduate readers might be misled by his confidence.

I was especially engaged by the discussion in chapter 2 of how Romans viewed female figures on coins or victory monuments, including the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias in western Anatolia. These are traditionally seen as personifications of the region, a perspective challenged by Isaac, who argues that it is our assumption that first-century Romans thought in figurative terms. While having some sympathy with Isaac's arguments regarding our inability to know how Romans of any period viewed things, I found myself unconvinced by this chapter. The arguments in this chapter would have been easier to follow if supported by illustrations.

Chapter 5 covers Core-Periphery notions. Isaac argues that the core-periphery ideas of Wallerstein are not applicable to antiquity, taking issue with how a number of scholars have made use of these concepts in their works. As with the discussion in chapter 2 about personification, there is a slight tendency towards rigidity, with Isaac being as much concerned with whether Wallerstein's ideas are applicable to the Roman Empire as he is in discussing how the Roman Empire worked.

Though there are some late Roman papers, Isaac seems less interested in what happened to the Roman world when it began to include large numbers of Christians. The three late Roman papers (chapter 10 on Romans and nomads in the fourth century), 15 on Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, (where a map focusing on this region would be useful), and 16 on military epigraphy in the Arabah provide useful information for

specialist but were less thought provoking to me about the ways in which the Roman Empire worked at this period.

As collected papers, there's inevitably a small amount of overlap, with the same incidents being repeated in various papers (notably the discussion of the term 'Syrian' in Chapters 6 (Names: Ethnic, Geographic and Administrative) and 7 (Attitudes towards provincial intellectuals). However, reading a series of articles on similar topics published at various dates produces an unexpected bonus, that of watching an academic at work, subtly changing directions and enhancing the arguments. I thought that Isaac appeared more interested in literature as a source of historical evidence than as a topic of study in itself. When discussing Lucian (164-169), I wondered if enough account was taken of the difference between the opinions of the author and of his characters, while the comments on Ammianus Marcellinus' use of Julius Caesar (225–226), for example, feel simplistic when placed against Gavin Kelly's 2008 reading of Ammianus Marcellinus, "The Allusive Historian" (Cambridge, 2008).

Overall, this was a stimulating collection of papers. Even as I found myself disagreeing with some of Isaac's arguments, they forced me to reconsider how I know what I think I know about Roman mentalities. Undergraduates would get a lot out of reading this book, though they might often be confused if they are not well informed about how the Roman Empire works, so perhaps best for advanced students in courses with discussion elements. I think it would be more useful for a university library (even though most would have many of the articles already published) than for most Romanists, but it would be very useful for a researcher working on ideology and ethnicity in the early Roman Empire.

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