

## BOOK REVIEW

*Rivers and the Power of Ancient Rome*. By BRIAN CAMPBELL. Studies in the History of Greece and Rome. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012. Pp. xvii + 585. Hardcover, \$70.00. ISBN 978-0-8078-3480-0.

Campbell's book on rivers throughout the Roman empire is a sprawling and at times recursive epic that makes valuable contributions to studies on ancient Rome and will be useful to scholars in a number of fields. That said, as with many river journeys, the going is not always easy. One of the book's main virtues—its comprehensiveness and boundary-crossing breadth—means that many will want to access the book by sections of particular interest rather than by following its long and winding course from beginning to end.

Chapter 1, after an introduction to riverine hydrology and a bracing geographical summary of rivers in the empire, summarizes the ten chapters of the book and lays out its approach: this will be a broad “empire-wide view of rivers and the interaction of local people with them ... based on what the ancients themselves wrote and thought about rivers” (37). The remaining nine chapters of the book are thus grounded in, though not limited to, the varied ancient texts, Greek as well as Latin, that have some bearing on rivers. This grounding in ancient sources fits well with another unifying feature the book, as indicated in the title: how did the Romans not only exploit rivers for power, but express and project that power through texts, coins, maps, rituals and other media of Roman ideology?

Chapter 2 discusses rivers as presented by ancient geographers, exploring how they depended on rivers to shape their geographical narratives and define the cultural boundaries of various regions. More than in the subsequent chapters, the wealth of detail and quotation in this chapter overwhelm the points being made.

Chapter 3 turns to rivers in the texts of lawyers and land surveyors. Campbell is on more solid ground here. Not only does he have a thorough grasp of these texts, which he has explored in previous publications, but his focus on rivers begins to yield insights in to Roman legal practices and issues of wider import, such as the extent to which Roman authorities exercised the power of eminent

domain. Copious footnotes back up his claims and relate his arguments to differing claims by other scholars. Chapter 4 turns from the texts of specialists (e.g., geographers and surveyors) to a survey of how rivers are represented in literature, myth, and art. The Tiber receives special attention, as does the iconography of rivers, and the relation of river images, in any media, to Roman power and prestige.

Chapter 5, "Rivers, Armies, Fleets, and Frontiers," draws on a wide range of ancient texts that have bearing on the military dimensions of rivers. Again, I was less drawn to the occasional theses of the chapter than to Campbell's illumination of particulars through context. A good example is his evaluation of Caesar's bridge across the Rhine as a monument to Roman power as well as to Caesar's own *dignitas*. There is much here too on particular bases and fleets on particular rivers, and on particular military operations.

Chapter 6, "Exploiting Rivers," surveys the various ways in which Romans used, navigated, and controlled rivers and river water. Topics include the types and terminology of riverboats, road vs. river transport, canals and dams, and (as artificial rivers) Roman aqueducts. As in Chapter 3, Campbell's focus on rivers provides a case study on the multitudinous and sometimes nuanced ways in which Rome imposed law, kept the peace, and promoted prosperity throughout its empire, in some cases simply by being an arbiter of what local engineering projects were worth constructing (241–2).

Chapter 7 and 8 are masterful surveys of important rivers throughout the empire, and an assessment to the role of rivers in the trade and economy of particular regions. Here as elsewhere in reference to the book's 19 maps, Campbell's text helpfully refers to both ancient and modern toponyms, supplementing the Ancient World Mapping Center's use of the former. Again the Tiber receives special attention, with ten pages on its traffic and floods.

Chapter 9 returns to the more topical approach of Chapter 6, concentrating on the recreational and healing properties of rivers, springs, and spas, as presented in various ancient texts. Spas receive special attention; there is a map, a key to the 189 sites on it, and a separate appendix devoted to categories of spas in the Roman world.

Chapter 10, "Rome in Control of the Waters," both sums up the role rivers played in Roman rule and pulls together discussions scattered throughout the text on the ideological and symbolic component of their control over nature.

The bibliography is extensive, reflecting the large and diverse range of evidence Campbell uses in his study. Indeed, in some cases the abundance of topics

and texts, and the range of Campbell's concerns, might have been better served by organizing the book in alphabetized, encyclopedic form (e.g., Agrimensores, Aqueducts, Ausonius, Canals, Danube, Iconography, Riverboats, Spas, etc.), allowing readers with particular interests to access these topics directly. Related to this, the general index is rather rudimentary, in contrast to the thorough indices of Persons and Places (though when looking up ancient authors, know your nomen: you will find Frontinus under Julius, Catullus under Valerius, Cicero under Tullius, Ausonius under Decimus, etc.).

Campbell's narrative approach, however (as opposed to the encyclopedic option), ends up responsible for what strikes me as the book's chief contribution. Slowly and patiently, using rivers as his particular medium, Campbell creates a nuanced picture of the military, economic, legal, and psychological ways in which Rome, adapting to local circumstances and changing conditions, operationalized the Virgilian formula *regere imperio populos ... pacique imponere morem*.

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