

BOOK REVIEW

Roman Social Imaginaries: Language and Thought in Contexts of Empire. By CLIFFORD ANDO. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pp. x + 124. Hardcover, \$45.00. ISBN 978-1-4426-5017-6.

This is an interesting study about ancient Roman ways of thinking with some insightful things to offer about Roman culture as its empire developed. The chapter topics are “Belonging,” “Cognition,” and “The Ontology of the Social,” although other subtopics such as political and ethnic identity, territoriality, and conceptual affinity are also addressed. The author also studies the use of “archetypal concepts” to give “Roman social theory” particular meanings. These include patterns of “metaphor, metonymy, analogy, and ideation” that serve to guide social thought. The author’s general concern is for the relationship between the “social imaginary” and “structures of language” (4–5 and note 3). All this relates to the Roman Empire in that the political realities of empire sometimes required new forms of language or metaphorical imagery to make sense of new situations.

Chapter One, “Belonging,” focuses on the concepts of *civitas* (“citizenship”) and also territory as being both political, denoted by *civitas*, and physical, denoted by *urbs* (“city”). As the Romans occupied other territories, such as Sicily, and brought them into its larger empire, a distinction was established between civil law (*ius civile*) of a particular people and natural law (*ius gentium*) created by natural reason and observed by all people (9). The empire was said to be “tessellated” into a pattern of constituent states that were all subject to the Roman center while also maintaining to some extent their own distinctive systems of law. The matter of Roman soil (*ager publicus*) is also discussed in this chapter: the Romans had strong sense of belonging (“affective attachment”) to the land (soil) that their state encompassed. Cicero and Livy both referred to the *solum patriae* (“soil of the fatherland”) that symbolized both liberty and connectedness for the Romans.

Chapter Two, “Cognition,” emphasizes the role of ideation and analogical reasoning in making Roman government possible. The Roman Empire was variegated and had to be described and regulated, but how to do this despite the

chaotic diversity of the imperial world was a problem. Also, there was the need to extend citizenship without destabilizing the “self-understanding of the metropolitan centre” (29–30). Concerning the “languages of analogy,” Ando distinguishes between two types: (1) the metaphorical language of *vicinitas*, which compares similarity to “geographic proximity,” thereby asserting a “relationship” between the things that are compared; and, by contrast, (2) *quasi* (“as if, just as”), which raises doubts about the capacity of language to give a full and accurate account of something.

An example of the latter concerns the “Twelve Tables,” the traditional source of Roman law that contain no *quasi*. Later interpreters felt the need to apply qualifications to them to fit matters currently at hand. This illustrates the principle: *plura sunt negotia quam vocabula* (“there are more things than words”), 40). Later, in discussing distinctions between the Greeks and the Romans, Ando concludes that for the Greeks, it was “descent or race” that bound communities of people together. Conversely, for the Romans, “juridical status, political membership, and affective belonging” were all connected: what kept Romans together was *ius Latinum* (“the Latin right”).

Chapter Three, “The Ontology of the Social,” begins with the observation that in the classical period, the Romans saw the “separate systems of law” as being parallel rather than hierarchical. The *ius gentium* was seen as the “aggregate” of the world’s various *iura civilia*. This understanding gave Roman law an element of “moral relativism.” In discussing the prime Roman institutions of law and religion, Ando contrasts other cultures in which these institutions had a “divine aetiology” that gave them “social authority”; the Romans, on the other hand, did not apply this reasoning to their own institutions, but rather combined a sense “historical self-understanding” with ways of describing the innovations needed in the present. Thus “Roman historical self-understanding” was related to the “ontology of the social.”

In regard to law Ando discusses Roman borrowing from others in ways that improved what they borrowed as well as Roman intellectuals’ use of Greek national law theory. Along the way, he observes that the newer versions of a law did not replace the older law but instead refined it (62–63). Likewise in regard to the institution of Roman religion, changes in ritual were understood to take place as circumstance dictated, and innovation in ritual was also thought to work through “substitution” (69). So, as in law, change in ritual was made with respect to earlier forms. Still, unlike the Christian Augustine who taught that God and his law pre-

ceded human life and human law, the Romans maintained the notion that human communities came before the institutions they initiated, including religion.

The “Conclusion” summarizes what has gone before as well as focusing in some detail on differences of status between those living within Rome (the “metropole”) and those living apart in colonies. Also, Ando writes about certain Latin phrases (*fundus fieri* and *Romani facti*) that had to do with issues of citizenship, privilege, and possession of property. Overall this study is a scholarly treatment of complex and subtle issues regarding Romans’ use of thought and language to deal with their empire. The book is relatively brief, but also dense reading. Still, the close reading required will be worthwhile for those interested in the topics covered.

JAMES F. JOHNSON

Austin College, jfrankjohn@icloud.com