

BOOK REVIEW

Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power. CARLOS F. NOREÑA. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xxii+456. Hardback, £65.00/\$105.00. ISBN 978-1-107-00508-2.

The reviewer wishes to apologize for the delay in producing this review, which was caused only in part by the richness and interest of the book. Values, virtues, qualities and emotions have received much productive attention in classical studies in recent years and continue to do so: Carlos Noreña's contribution here takes on some important questions about power and about the operation of the networks that constituted the Roman Empire. It does so by employing an innovative methodological approach, one foreshadowed in his earlier publications (e.g. his 'The Communication of the Emperor's Virtues', *JRS* 91 (2001), 146-68).

Engaging in a dialogue with the approaches of Lendon 2006 (*Empire of Honor*) and Ando 2000 (*Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*) amongst others, Noreña explores some of the ways in which the local aristocracies of the Roman empire were able to use the kinds of values and virtues that were being promoted by the 'central state', broadly conceived, in order to cement their own authority. Noreña argues that this was made possible—or at least easier—by the existence of a system with at its head an emperor who was both an actor and a symbolic presence.

Noreña's emperor is quite rightly not a monolith but a figure that could be conceived of and represented in multiple ways. It is by exploring the particular nature of the values and virtues with which this figure was associated that Noreña carves out a picture of the high empire (from Trajan to Marcus Aurelius) as 'ideologically unified' in a way that the earlier, and in particular the later, empire was not. For when the means of representing the emperor in local contexts (which mapped in interesting ways, all well explored by Noreña, onto the 'central' means of representation) changed from showing the emperor as an ethical model for local civic benefactors, who could portray themselves as sharing similar qualities, to viewing him as a single *dominus*, we see one important reason among the many for which local elites lost their incentive to engage in local benefaction.

For Noreña we should not be thinking about ‘propaganda’ in the top-down sense in which the term is usually employed, nor eschewing the idea of these discourses as legitimating both for the ‘central state’ and also for the local elites. We should not consider the replication of these values in local contexts as expressions of loyalty to Rome in the hope of direct reciprocity, nor see them as an attempt to carve out identity in a strictly local context. Instead, for Noreña they are a calculating bid to maintain aristocratic power on a local level.

Noreña’s overall conclusions are in many ways so plausible as to verge on the unsurprising, although they are less incompatible than he sometimes suggests with the other arguments with which he is engaging. The real value of this thought-provoking book lies in its attempt to tease out *how* all this really happened by focussing on two large bodies of evidence: over 185,000 silver and bronze coins minted at Rome AD 69–235 and, in the second part of the book, 575 official and honorific inscriptions. About the limitations of the latter dataset in particular, which are much greater than those of the former, Noreña is properly open. Specific connections between individual coins or inscriptions are not the focus here—the potential of the quantitative approach is that it tries to work at a higher level of overall connection to build a broader picture.

The work will be valuable to many readers. The second chapter on the ‘ethical profile’ of the emperor is superb. Undergraduates among others may find particularly useful the splendid broad-brush overview of the Roman Empire in the introduction, discussion of the usefulness or otherwise of the term ‘propaganda’, and the exploration of the differences between *optimus* and *dominus* (chapter 5).

For those introducing new graduates to methodological approaches this should be an obvious candidate for evaluation and one that will produce lively debate about Noreña’s use of quantification as an approach to thinking about ‘cultural and political’ questions. Others will also be interested in testing Noreña’s claims about broad correspondences between individual *congiaria* and the representation of *liberalitas* on coins; or of the inverse relationship (the opposite of what one might have supposed) between *aequitas* types and debased coinage.

Criticisms, aside from some concerns about the viability of drawing very safe conclusions of the above type from even this quantity of data, really fall under the rubric of further questions raised by the work. The greatest frustration for this reviewer is the impossibility for Noreña (for lack of evidence) of fleshing out his comments about the effect of the embedded court on the transmission of the values that he probes. The world Noreña portrays is also one in which those low-

er down the social ladder than the local elites in the provinces, though not unworthy of study, are unable to effect social and political change and therefore not properly a part of the investigation, despite a suggestive few pages in chapter 6.

One very positive result of this splendid work is the very questions it raises about the degree of compatibility of its claims with those of Ando, Lendon and others, and about how material from the eastern part of the empire and from these lower strata could complement the overall picture. This is an intellectually stimulating work.

ANNA CLARK

Christ Church, Oxford, anna.clark@chch.ox.ac.uk

