



‘évergétisme’, which implies a specific understanding of Roman society and (more or less exclusive) elite behaviour, there is still a methodological problem in quantifying the share of private contributions to the design and building of cities in the Roman Empire. The practice of inscribing cannot be taken for granted in the case of objects financed from the public purse in contrast to the epigraphic advertisement of privately donated buildings, parts of building decorations, repair or reconstruction works. The volume illustrates the importance of continuing the discussion of both the terminological and the methodological aspects. The proceedings of this conference add substantially to our understanding of the local differences and chronological developments of the social practice of private funding of public buildings as part of ancient ‘euergetism’. The numerous illustrations of high quality and often in colour, the maps, plans and statistics are an additional benefit to the presentation of the analyses and research results.

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SULLA REDEFINES TIME

HAY (P.) *Saeculum. Defining Historical Eras in Ancient Roman Thought*. Pp. x + 262. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2023. Cased, US\$55. ISBN: 978-1-4773-2739-5.

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H.’s book is an intriguing investigation of the development of chronological periodisation from 88 BCE to 17 CE with reference to the concept of a *saeculum*. This is worth stating at the outset, because from the title alone readers may have expected rather more than this. The centrality of Lucius Cornelius Sulla, to whom H. attributes a revolutionary new usage of periodisation, is also a major focus of the book. H. sees this phenomenon embedded in the *Memoirs of Sulla* that appears as fragments in Plutarch’s *Life of Sulla*. These self-styled memoirs, H. suggests, create ‘Sulla, preordained by the gods to bring about a new *saeculum*, [and he] would rule over Rome and favorably transform Roman life and culture’ (p. 21). This was reinforced by a reformation of the calendar and is traced to the abundant coinage minted by Sulla. Not least amongst these was a coin featuring Hercules strangling the Nemean Lion as a prototype for Sulla to become the saviour of mankind in 88 BCE, the year of an Etruscan omen introducing a new *saeculum* (pp. 26–7). This interconnection of much-scattered evidence (as H. observes, p. 27) presents Sulla as a revolutionary thinker utilising the Etruscan concept of a new *saeculum*, created by an exceptional man from civil war and chaos, and H. maintains that Sulla is the first to make such a connection as the formulator of a new temporal logic (evidenced by Plut. *Sull.* 7.3–5). H. is persuasive, but he admits that ‘No ancient source actually declares Sulla unique in this regard, nor does anyone explicitly attribute their use of periodization language to an innovation by Sulla’ (p. 36). Thus, H. is mapping an ‘intellectual trend’ surviving in a variety of fragmentary sources that points to a greater interest in temporal thinking in the first century BCE. There is a problem with all this: the Etruscans had delineated such temporal thinking at an earlier date – if we are to read Varro embedded in Censorinus (*DN* 17.5–6). Moreover, there is a level of uncertainty that Sulla really

was the first innovator to connect himself and his actions with the opening of a new *saeculum* for the benefit of Rome and its citizens.

It is possible that the connection to Sulla, such a focus for H., distracts us from his fascinating exploration of the idea of temporal concepts in the first century BCE. For example, Chapter 2 opens with the observation that ‘Sulla’s popularization of the Etruscan divinatory language of the *saeculum* may have been the seed that would soon flourish as the rise of secular discourse’ (p. 40): this makes readers wonder at H.’s level of certainty and to ask: what was the Etruscan concept of *saeculum* – so disconnected from Rome and its citizens living across Italy, including within Etruria? In Chapter 3 H. looks at the periodisation of moral decline; turning points were variously attributed to: 168 BCE (transfer of debauchery from Macedonia to Rome, Polyb. 31.25.3–8); 154 BCE (*puđicitia* runs rampant in Piso Frugi, Plin. *NH* 17.244); 146 BCE (fall of Carthage, Sall. *Cat.* 6–13); whereas Livy (39.6.7) goes for 187 BCE, when Manlius Vulso’s army returns from Asia. The last is almost 100 years earlier than 88 BCE, thus a full *saeculum* before Sulla’s self-acclaimed new *saeculum*. H. points out that Livy was writing post-Sulla, but could this not be read as evidence for a presence of thinking about *saecula* prior to Sulla? In any case, for Sulla to bring into being a new *saeculum*, there needs to be a concept of an earlier *saeculum*. There is a full discussion in Chapter 3 of the concept of *saecula* within poetry and the overall theme of moral decline with, of course, Augustus as the man to open a new *saeculum* and with Livia as his female equivalent, as seen at least by Ovid in exile (pp. 77–9).

The concept of the great man defining a new *saeculum* is thoroughly explored by H., but he goes further to extend it to ‘the idea of a single person introducing a major human innovation’ (p. 96), almost in the manner of Prometheus, to alter human existence, which can be found across Latin literature from a play attributed to Plautus now lost, the *Boeotia*, in which the inventor of sundials is attacked for affecting eating habits, to the array of inventors in Pliny’s *Natural History*. This aspect is explored in Chapter 4. This historiographical feature of antiquity also shapes our own concept of what is known through the association of innovation with individuals, for example Pompey’s theatre in stone (55 BCE), creating in modern studies an equation between a theatre and the man who built it (or its moment of creation), rather than its use over centuries long after Pompey’s death within a decade of the theatre being completed. The ancient concept of *saecula* being associated with a great man or men reinforces what we see today as the reduction of history into the tales of great men from antiquity, whether Julius Caesar or Augustus – who has his own *saecula* in antiquity and is still associated with an ‘Augustan Age’ in modern historiography, which is shaped solely by the chance fact of his chronological longevity (W. Scheidel, ‘Emperors, Aristocrats, and the Grim Reaper: towards a Demographic Profile of the Roman Élite’, *CQ* 49 [1999], 254–81).

Chapter 5 focuses on what happens to the association between *saecula* or periodisation after Sulla and finds that periodisation seems to have been avoided in political discourse, presumably due to Sulla’s less than favourable posthumous reputation. H. points to Cicero using the language of periodisation with reference to both Pompey and himself as ‘the man of the *saeculum*’ in 63 BCE, clutching at a portend interpreted by Etruscan seers (p. 109). It was a concept completely avoided by Julius Caesar, which seems strange given that he fixed the calendar (pp. 110–11). It is in the triumviral period that we find the emergence of Messalla Corvinus and Agrippa as men of their *saeculum*. Most will know of Tibullus 1.7, but H. brings in the lesser-known poems *Ciris* and *Catelepton* (pp. 111–12) to demonstrate the application of temporal thinking, but I should add that in 1.7.57–60 we find Messalla Corvinus paving a road in *silex* (lava) described as a *monumenta* that we might understand as built for a *saeculum* due to its quality and durability. In contrast,

Agrippa, in his aedileship of 33 BCE, is linked by H., via the cleaning of the Cloaca Maxima, to Hercules diverting a river to clean the stables of Augeas and to argue, in contrast to scholarship emphasising the practical nature of this aedileship, that Agrippa was demonstrating ‘his epochal nature as a leader’ (p. 112). Here H. misses the possibility of connecting the building of the Aqua Julia by Agrippa as a further reference to the myth of Hercules in diverting a river to clean the stables (pp. 113–15). I have added here two minor extensions of H.’s analysis to show how stimulating the book is and its importance in refiguring other areas of Roman history – not least the history of construction.

There is much more in the book that cannot be covered in this review: eternal returns (Chapter 2) and literary periodisation (Chapter 6). It is well written with a clear argument that temporal periodisation mattered to the Romans in the first century BCE, prefiguring the ‘Augustan Age’ (on which there is much discussion). Yet, reading the book, I was still left wondering whether Sulla was that original and, if he was, why did the concept of a Sullan *saeculum* become quite so murky and fragmented in the sources that survive? Putting this matter aside, the book is worth reading to open your mind to the concept of the Romans taking action with a view to a future that would last beyond their own lifetime.

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IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

PRICE (J. J.), FINKELBERG (M.), SHAHAR (Y.) (edd.) *Rome: an Empire of Many Nations. New Perspectives on Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Identity*. Pp. xiv + 410, b/w & colour ills, b/w & colour maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Cased, £90, US\$120. ISBN: 978-1-108-47945-5.

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This handsomely produced volume originated in a 2015 conference in honour of Benjamin Isaac in Tel Aviv. Price’s brief introduction frames the volume’s essays as countering ancient and modern tendencies to foreground the ‘success’ of the Roman Empire, whether in terms of durability, strategy or unification. Instead, the essays emphasise the experience of local individuals and groups, in terms of ‘identity and inner lives’ (p. 5), inspired in part by Isaac’s *The Limits of Empire. The Roman Army in the East* (1990) and *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (2004). Price emphasises postcolonialism as pivotal in the trajectory of Roman imperial studies, but at the same time signals some scepticism about that approach, and other twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical approaches, as well as the longevity of identity studies more generally (pp. 4–6).

The essays are arranged into four thematic parts, ‘Ethnicity and Identity in the Roman Empire’, ‘Culture and Identity in the Roman Empire’, ‘Ethnicity and Identity in the Roman Empire: the Case of the Jews’ and ‘Iudaea/Palaestina’, the first two of which are somewhat loose and arbitrary categories. There is no further curation beyond brief summaries of individual papers in Price’s introduction. Papers in the first two sections mainly go their