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BOOK REVIEW

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## Globalisation and the Roman World: World History, Connectivity and Material Culture

Edited by Martin Pitts and Miguel John Versluys. Pp. x + 296, figs. 20, maps 2. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015. \$99. ISBN 978-1-107-04374-9 (cloth).

Reviewed by [Rebecca J. Sweetman](#)

Nearly two decades after globalization became used as a means of defining processes of the Roman empire, notably with the work of Hitchner ("Globalization avant la lettre: Globalization and the History of the Roman Empire," *New Global Studies* 2 [2008] 1–12), this volume sets out to revisit and refresh the issues that have beleaguered the debate. Such deliberations seem to have reached a publication peak between 2007 and 2009, but as many of the contributors to this volume note, both traditional means and terminology to understand the Roman empire such as romanization (Laurence and Trifilò) and new applications such as creolization have left a sense of discontented acceptance. However, a recent issue of *Archaeological Dialogues* (21[1] [2014]) has helped revive and broaden the debate. The volume under review is a carefully constructed multilayered volume that furthers this work by looking back at past analyses of globalization and casting an eye forward through applications of the theory to new data. While the two introductions to the volume (Pitts and Versluys; Hingley) situate the debate, the following seven chapters address a range of themes, many of which share common foci, giving the volume unity that might otherwise be lost in such a wide-ranging edition. The final two papers, by Nederveen Pieterse and Hodos, help consolidate many of the earlier discussions. Nederveen Pieterse provides a perspective from globalization studies that draws out contributions such as that of Isayev, who looks at United Nations data for figures on contemporary mobility.

Many of the contributors set out to address common criticisms of the application of globalization theory by dealing with the challenges head on, as well as advancing the debate through new approaches and application of the evidence. Assertions that globalization is a modern phenomenon (following Wallerstein's 1500 C.E. date for the first world economy) are addressed by some (Pitts, Morley); others (Versluys, Isayev, Sommer) contend that it was already in process in the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic and earlier periods.

The importance of accounting for context, time, and space in the application of globalization as set out in the introductions lays the groundwork for further elaborations by the contributors. Hingley takes a hermeneutical approach in proposing that the past and present are not temporally discrete in terms of globalization, while Pitts and Versluys take the discussion further to suggest that in the future the term globalization will possibly be misleading given its contextual dependency. This point, while potentially true, somewhat undermines the broader aims of the volume. Solid arguments for ancient globalization are presented by both Versluys and Sommer, who highlight changes to the *oikoumene* in terms of increasing connectivity and the importance of the *longue durée* in application of the theory. Furthermore, the issue of the context of consciousness is analyzed by Isayev, who queries the extent to which the Mediterranean population was aware of the processes of globalization and its impact on them (or not).

Perceptions that globalization primarily concerns economy and identity are dealt with by Morley and Pitts, who move the debate forward partly by dealing with ideas of consumption. In doing so, Pitts stresses the extent to which studies of consumption have been so entwined with traditional definitions of romanization that it has hampered progress. He notes some practical difficulties in applying globalization theories, such as the way artifacts are variously dealt with across different regions. Many contributors warn of overcorrecting perceived biases such as a Rome-centric view by leaving Rome out of the debate or making everything too inclusive (Nederveen Pieterse). The application of theory to specific case studies, such as pottery in London and Colchester as well as epithets on grave markers for Roman Britain (Laurence and Trifilò), works well. Versluys searches beyond the most obvious reasons for movement of goods by looking

at analysis of more recent material. Through the example of the presence of carrack porcelain in China, he stresses the importance of flexibility in interpreting the data: in the 17th century, Europeans thought this porcelain was a marker of elite social status, and the Chinese thought it elite because it was a western fashion.

After the materials-based discussions of Morley, Pitts, and Laurence and Trifilò, Isayev's paper on Polybius and other contributors shift the discussion to the movement of people. Movement of people is not always easy to trace without losing the element of consistency needed to contribute to discussions on network connections and in turn globalization. Isayev's autopsy of the epigraphic material shows that it is not always in keeping with data from other sources regarding numbers and movement of people, thus further stressing the value of the multiperspective approach. The case studies in other papers highlight this well: for example, the role of the changing time-space compression is examined by Laurence and Trifilò through commodities and epigraphy, and Sommer uses Aristides' panegyric.

The self-reflective elements used throughout the volume are a welcome approach. Definitions of globalization, its value, and its application are repeatedly probed in the individual papers. While some of this might have been confined to the introduction (leaving a little more room for application of the data), contributors do not always agree with one another, so there are cases in which some contextualization of the terminology is necessary. In many respects, it is refreshing that there is not always complete agreement between papers; for example, Morley argues that change in the time-space compression is insignificant, while Versluys argues the opposite.

All contributors discuss how the application of globalization has the potential to be useful. Morley talks about it in terms of being "good to think with" (65), and Laurence and Trifilò suggest that globalization is an academic discourse rather than a coherent theory one can add to as well as learn from. Pitts stresses the value of globalization in terms of addressing the "paradox of unity and diversity within the Roman Empire" (74). This is further developed by Laurence and Trifilò, who argue that global should be seen as being produced by the empire as a whole and expressed differently locally. Isayev's point about how events such as migration/mobility are conceived as discrete occurrences rather than as ongoing events that have lasting impact enhances this further. Globalization is much more about contact and connectivity than it is about cultural change. It is understood as a means for connections as well as the result of connections. The notion of the universalization of the particular and particularization of the universal is developed by Pitts (93), and this definition in many respects is key to understanding globalization as both a product and an agent of change as stressed by many contributors, including Morley and Versluys. The value of it is that it allows a means of accounting for elements of common (global) practice at the same time as local interpretation of global features. Versluys applies this idea neatly through his application to material culture and in particular to the images of the dying Gaul, which had two opposing meanings for the Pergamenes and the Romans.

While this volume goes a long way to resetting the discussion and providing some application, more is required. From the local perspective, it would have been useful to have explored ideas of intentional and nonintentional participation in the globalized empire. Hodos (250) stresses the importance of understanding the means of globalization and, as such, network studies, as a way forward. While many contributors note the importance of networks, more case studies (including a range of areas, periods, and material), as well as development of how the connections work, are needed to avoid flattening the context. In turn, this would help highlight another potentially important aspect of globalization theory, which is that individuals and areas have a degree of choice in whether they participate in the network.

Witcher notes that an acceptable definition of globalization is critical to correct potential bias given the diverse nature of archaeological data collection and interpretation. Moreover, the wider use of the Roman world in popular culture means that scholars should be accountable for setting a fair and acceptable view of the Roman world it. Conversely, Morley warns against defining globalization in such a wide range of ways that it loses academic rigor, and he also notes that the way it is applied to different types of material differs, which creates further dilution of the theory. The editors note the importance of defining globalization, and they offer as one definition (11): "processes by which localities and people become increasingly interconnected and interdependent." However, the opportunity for individual case studies to test this is not taken up as extensively as it might have been here. This volume does much to positively enhance Appadurai's notion that globalization theories concern a "world of disjunctive flows" through the approaches and material, as noted by Pitts and Versluys (7). The editors highlight their desire for this

volume to inspire future studies; overall, the volume is refreshing in its scholarly honesty, and it has the potential to set the debates on globalization and the Roman world firmly back on track.

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