

Beattie, C. (2020): 'Sarah Davies, *Rome, Global Dreams, and the International Origins of an Empire*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xii, 208, figs. 5. ISBN 978-90-04-41226-2 (Hbk) €110.00. E-ISBN 978-90-04-41190-6. <https://brill.com/view/title/54221> (E-Book, PDF) €110.00.'

Rosetta **25**: 18 - 22

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue25/Beattie.pdf>

---

**Sarah Davies, *Rome, Global Dreams, and the International Origins of an Empire*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xii, 208, figs. 5. ISBN 978-90-04-41226-2 (Hbk) €110.00. E-ISBN 978-90-04-41190-6. <https://brill.com/view/title/54221> (E-Book, PDF) €110.00.**

*Reviewed by Connor Beattie.*

Davies presents this monograph as an ideological approach to the Roman empire, an amalgamation of what she identifies as Eckstein's structural approach (the use of International Relations Theory, or IRT, to understand the structure behind interstate interactions), and Gruen's cultural approach (the cultural interactions between Rome and the Hellenistic World) with a particular attention to 'reified space' (p.12). Dissatisfied with attempts to explain the taxonomy and success of the Roman empire from the angle of warfare or international politics, she wants to do so in terms of ideology: 'this study seeks to understand the origins of the Roman empire from the angle of the pen', as opposed to the sword (p.13). Davies argues that the intellectual background of Rome's initial rise to power in the Mediterranean was one where intellectuals were thinking about the world as a shared and unified being (*oikoumene*) based on Hellenistic culture – the ultimate goal was the 'world-city' (*kosmopolis*), as set out in the 'Dream of Zeno'. Rome was part of this Hellenised *oikoumene* but substantially different to either a Hellenistic monarchy or city: for Davies it was these differences which gave Rome the capacity to become a '*patris*' for everyone in the *oikoumene* and, therefore, become the *kosmopolis*. This notion of a world-*polis* was adopted by the Romans under Augustus and became central to the notion of *imperium sine fine*.

In Chapter 1 ('Pan-Hellenism Goes Global'), Davies presents the Greeks' view of the *oikoumene* as an international society with a defined 'politics of prestige' centred on Hellenistic culture; there were barbarians on the outside but they could be integrated into this international order. Davies argues that the *kosmopolis* in the 'Dream of Zeno' was the endpoint to which this globalising view aimed. In Chapter 2 ('The Problem of Rome's *Politeia*'), she shows how the novelties of Rome's *politeia* (the legal status of the *res publica*, division of power between Senate and magistrates,

third-party arbitration) meant it was not like Hellenistic monarchies or cities, and so had the capacity to become a *kosmopolis*. In Chapter 3 ('The Majesty of Rome'), Davies argues that four features of Roman rule (Roman approaches to warfare, Roman *imperium* and *maiestas*, the *populus Romanus*, and *Roma*) facilitated this very realisation because it presented the Roman legal order as divine and all-embracing. Chapter 4 ('A Cloud from the West') is divided into two parts: first, she describes the tools that intellectuals used to impose a framework of uniformity and interconnectivity on such a fragmented and local world (the language of *oikoumene*, the Olympiad dating system, kinship diplomacy); second, the negative reactions to the growth of Roman power contained in apocalyptic sources like the Book of Daniel, the Bahman Yasht, and Book III of the Sibylline Oracles. Chapter 5 ('A Liminal Finale') assesses Polybius' attitude towards the empire, arguing that he used the period 167-146 BC as a 'historical laboratory' to assess whether Roman power was good or bad and if one day it would fall like the previous great empires. Finally, Chapter 6 ('*Roma Aeterna*') acts as a conclusion for the monograph, both thematically and chronologically, as Davies tries to show how the concept of a *kosmopolis* permeated into Augustan ideas of the Roman empire.

The originality and merit of this work lies in it not simply accepting that the Mediterranean world was interconnected, but exploring how this interconnection was created, articulated and perpetually reworked by contemporaries. The best parts of Davies' analysis come in Chapter 1 and the first part of Chapter 4 where she expresses this (see above). Consequently, serious work on Middle Republican imperialism in the future will have to assess the growth of Roman power against this intellectual background of '*oikoumene*-thinking'. Moreover, by demonstrating the way that literary works in particular formed a genuine part of the discourse on power she has shown that any attempt to analyse interstate relations in this period must combine diplomacy and warfare with mythology, religion, literary culture, and identity rather than focus disproportionately on the former. In this sense, she has accomplished her main goal of combining the cultural and structural approaches identified in her introduction.

However, the central problem with this monograph is that Davies is not very convincing in showing that there was any serious desire amongst the Romans to make Rome the *kosmopolis*, let alone that 'Rome was the *kosmopolis*' (p.147):

where all men had come together, ceased living in separate cities and *demes* with their own judicial systems and customs, and had become one people like Zeno dreamed (p. 28-29) or where “conquerors” and “conquered” truly became one and worked as allies in a new, global *politeia*, as “Romans” and “Greeks” together, with a new *demos*, a new aristocracy, and a new monarchic element’ (p. 148).

As an illustration, Davies concludes her section on Melinno’s Hymn (Stobaeus, Eclogues 3.7.12)<sup>1</sup> by stating that: ‘*Roma* stood at the helm, and the cities of the *oikoumene* contained all of HER peoples... “*Roma*” was coalescing with *patris* (or “home town/city”)’ (p. 100); and in the section on her analysis of Cicero’s *De Legibus* 2.5 she states, ‘in the end, though, Rome was THE homeland of a higher, shared order, for it was the one linked to the greater, universal citizenship of the *res publica*’ (p. 101). However, the wording of Melinno’s Hymn (see Bowra, 1957: 21-28 and Erksine, 1997: 368-386) shows that *Roma* was specifically linked to the Roman people (‘you alone of all bear the most powerful great spear-carrying men’) and it even contains the language of subjugation (‘beneath your yoke of powerful straps’). The worship of *Roma* cannot be read as a proto-imperial cult, but more as an attempt to praise the Romans and make their sudden rise to power intelligible from a Greek perspective. Furthermore, at best Cicero does not support her point because he is specifically discussing the problem of being a citizen of two cities; at worst he actively undermines her argument because the feeling of loyalty he has to Rome comes precisely from citizenship and his lifelong participation in the *res publica*, showing that it was this, not some abstract notion of a *kosmopolis*, that generated a feeling of belonging. Polybius<sup>2</sup> further frustrates Davies’ argument (also see Lavan 2013: 73-123) because he articulates Roman power in imperial terms, as one people ruling over another: he deploys the language not only of *arche*, *hegemonia* and *dunasteia* but also of *kurios* and *despotes* as normative interstate discourse.

---

<sup>1</sup> Translations following Davies, 2019: 100 who uses Plant, 2004: 99-100. However, it must be noted that Davies fails to provide a bibliographic reference for this work.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of “Slavery Rhetoric” to describe interstate power appear in Polyb. 3.35.4; 3.64.4; 3.111.9; 7.9.12-14; 8.24.1; 9.28-31; 9.32-39; 9.42.6; 11.5.1; 11.12.3; 15.10.2; 18.11.3-12; 18.34.1; 18.45.6; 21.15.7-12; 21.19.5-11; 24.13.1-7; 29.21.4; 38.12.7-9.

Davies does not see it this way, as her final analysis of the *Gemma Augustea* demonstrates: 'it implicitly declares that the so-called dream of Zeno... had truly come to fruition... Roman *arche* was thus the dream of Zeno.' (p.150; 152). For Davies, *arche/dunasteia/imperium* is not the antithesis of the *kosmopolis*; they are one and the same. But to drastically change the meaning of such terms requires convincing evidence that contemporaries thought along these lines, evidence that the above suggests she does not provide in a convincing way. There probably was a narrative along the lines Davies sets out, but the interesting question should be why the Romans resisted embracing such a narrative if it existed. If anything, this might reveal more about how the Romans understood power and how they wanted their 'empire' to be conceptualised because it would emphasise the degree to which the Romans wanted to maintain a distinction between 'conquerors' and 'conquered'. Therefore, while this reviewer is fully convinced that the Roman Empire of the Middle Republic needs to be explained in ideological terms, they are not convinced that the integrated *kosmopolis* is the way to do this.

As a final note, Davies' *kosmopolis* argument invites a serious self-reflection on how we as scholars approach the Roman Empire. Most historians today treat the Roman Empire as a political structure: Davies epitomises this view when she speaks of 'the singularity of an Empire' (p. 14) and wants to explain 'how "Rome" became an Empire' (p.12) because it shows that she is thinking about the Roman Empire as a single state-structure. These historians do not believe that this structure could have been created or had such longevity by violent means alone; there must have been something positive binding this structure together. However, there are alternative ways of understanding what an 'empire' is and how power dynamics worked: a processual approach, for example, might see the power dynamics of empire existing only in diplomatic discourse and the flashpoints of contact such as military conflict or embassies to and from Rome. It is critical that we re-engage with what we mean by 'empire' at the most fundamental level if we are going to avoid talking past each other in our discussions.

## **Bibliography**

### **Ancient Sources**

Cicero, *On the Republic and On the Laws*, trans. C. Keyes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

Melinno, *Hymn* in Stobaeus, *Eclogues*, trans. and ed. I.M. Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: An Anthology*. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 2004).

Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. W. Paton, F. Walbank and C. Habicht. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010-2012).

### **Modern Scholarship**

Bowra, C.M. 1957. 'Melinno's Hymn to Rome', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 47(1): 21-28.

Erksine, A. 1997. 'Rome in the Greek World: The Significance of a Name', in A. Powell (ed.), *The Greek World*. London, New York: Routledge, 368-386.

Lavan, M. 2013. *Slaves to Rome: paradigms of empire in Roman Culture* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.