

Michael Maas: *The Conqueror's Gift. Roman Ethnography and the End of Antiquity*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press 2025. XV, 432 pp., 6 ill., 3 maps. \$ 49.95/£ 42.00. ISBN: 978-0-691-25902-4.

In this wide-ranging and stimulating book Michael Maas investigates evolving ways in which inhabitants of the later Roman empire viewed, and in many cases attempted to control, the world through the categorisation of its peoples. In part this involves presentation of the classical traditions that the inhabitants of this diverse world could bring to bear, but even more importantly it considers the impact of the new imperial religion of Christianity on modes of perception and analysis. Maas has been contemplating, and publishing on, aspects of his topic for over three decades, an engagement that is apparent in the richness of the discussions: 269 pages of text are underpinned by 87 pages of notes, though regrettably the latter take the form of end notes – publishers might reflect on how inconvenient this is for those reading the e-book.

The Introduction (“Empires Need Ethnography”, pp. 1–20) defines the book’s terms and parameters. Most important is the definition of ethnography: this is treated as a very broad concept, effectively any way in which people, in this case inhabitants of the Roman empire and in a few cases of the post-Roman world, wrote about other peoples, usually those outside the empire but on occasions some within it. As a result, the book can embrace far more than would be encompassed by the narrow concept of ethnography as a literary genre, as is reviewed, for example, in the chapter on Late Antiquity in Anthony Kaldellis’ book.<sup>1</sup> There is also an attempt to explain the title (pp. 2–3), why and how ethnography might be seen as a gift, especially one bestowed or imposed by the imperial rulers. There is a tripartite analysis of the ethnographic gift, first as a gift from the Romans to themselves as imperial controllers as a means to organise the cultural diversity of their broad world; second as a gift forced on the recipients of this Roman vision who then had to identify ways to negotiate their place within this possibly unwelcome structure; and third as a gift to succeeding generations that continues to distort international perceptions in the modern world. This trinity of gifts

1 A. Kaldellis: *Ethnography After Antiquity. Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature*. Philadelphia, PA 2013 (*Empire and After*), pp. 11–37.

remains latent in subsequent discussions until it is restated, at slightly greater length, at the very end of the book (pp. 267–269). Perhaps the fact that the title needs explanation might have rung alarm bells, though it does “fit on the cover, and catch the reader’s eye”, two of the requirements for a title noted by Maas (p. 2).

The Introduction then surveys three ways in which the period of Late Antiquity (AD 250–650) was different from the early empire (pp. 3–7), namely through the break-up of the Roman state, first in the West through the tribal incursions of the fifth century and then in the East as a result of the Islamic conquests in the seventh; the transformation to a Christian state whose religion had an ecumenical mission; and ethnographic shifts that brought new peoples into the Roman world and redefined existing ones. The next section (pp. 7–11) considers the genre of ethnography, first in general and then in its Roman manifestation where it involved description, assessment, and inclusion. Finally, the book’s shape is presented as filling the gap between Greg Woolf’s study of the West between 100 BC and AD 100<sup>2</sup> and Kaldellis’ book on Byzantium that has just been mentioned (pp. 11–20).

The first chapter (“Conquest and Curiosity: Creating a Roman Imperial Ethnography”, pp. 21–52) establishes the basis for ethnography in Late Antiquity through a series of case studies of earlier Roman ethnography as well as a glance at the Greek literary traditions that Roman writers developed, including how Rome came to occupy centre stage in the Hellenic world of the second century BC. The case studies range from Polybius to Ptolemy, with particular attention to Julius Caesar, Strabo, and Tacitus. Polybius’ analysis in book 6 of his history was intended to explain Roman success to his Greek audience, which of course included some Romans and Italians, and focused on much more than constitutional stability by incorporating military matters such as battle formations, encampments, discipline, and the distribution of booty, as well as social practices such as aristocratic funerals. It was, significantly, located immediately after the account of Roman’s defeat at Cannae. Polybius’ survey could have served Maas as a precedent for his inclusive approach to ethnography as well as illustrating how Rome was perceived by outsiders, which is what Polybius was despite his close links to the Scipio

2 G. Woolf: *Tales of the Barbarians. Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West*. Malden, MA/Chichester 2011 (Blackwell Bristol Lectures on Greece, Rome and the Classical Tradition).

family. Another, but less flattering, perception of Rome that might have been noted is the well-known speech that Tacitus composed for the Caledonian leader Calgacus, in which an assessment of rapacious Roman conquest concludes with “They make a desert and call it peace”.<sup>3</sup> Attention might also have been paid, briefly, to the ways in which Hellenistic Greeks incorporated the new superpower into their existing thought world, for example with Lampsacus and Smyrna appealing for help against Antiochus III in 197/196 BC: the former invoked kinship through a shared Trojan ancestry and exploited their colonial link with Massilia, Rome’s ally in southern Gaul, to buttress their request, while the latter referred to the city’s cult of the goddess Roma.<sup>4</sup> Religion as an agent for conceptualising the world long antedated Christianity, and Roman methods of dealing with outsiders were influenced by how different external entities interacted with Rome. This chapter is the most ‘ethnographic’ part of the book in terms of ethnography as a literary genre, but although it aims to “set the stage for late antique developments” (p. 51) there is no consideration of late antique exponents of the genre. Also, granted the importance of Herodotus as a model for ethnography in the sixth century,<sup>5</sup> it might have been worth including a case study of him.

Chapter 2 (“Hostiles and Friendlies’: Diplomacy and Patterns of Subordination to Rome”, pp. 53–98) focuses on international relations including both the evolution of modes of address and the vexed question of gifts and how the supposed generosity of a superior power could also be easily perceived as a sign of weakness and the payment of tribute. To the north Attila and then the Avars exploited this contradiction, as too did the Persians when competing against the Romans for influence with the Turkish khagan (Joh. Eph. hist. eccl. 6.23). The meat of the chapter consists of three case studies of eastern diplomacy, the first being Rome’s dealings with Persia (“The Dilemma of Equality”, pp. 63–80) which vacillated between the poles of rare instances of equality and respect on the one hand and on the other the more frequent claims to superiority/subordination. In both modes the language

3 Tac. Agr. 30.

4 *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecorum* 191; Tac. ann. 4.56.

5 See A. Ziebuhr: Die Exkurse im Geschichtswerk des Prokopios von Kaisareia. Literarische Tradition und spätantike Gegenwart in klassizistischer Historiographie. Stuttgart 2024 (Hermes. Einzelschriften 126). Reviewed by Mi. Whitby in: Plekos 26, 2024, pp. 631–635 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2024/r-ziebuhr.pdf>).

of kinship was employed, a device that the Sasanids probably adopted from eastern predecessors and introduced to the Romans. Nuances might be subtle. Brotherhood certainly suggested equality, but might conceal deception as when Justin I wrote to Kavadh to warn him that his new ally, the Hun Zilgibi, was supposedly double-crossing the Persians, or be subverted by other aspects of a message as when Kavadh addressed Justinian as the Caesar of the setting moon while presenting himself as the King of kings of the rising sun.<sup>6</sup> In diplomatic dealings both rulers attempted to outmanoeuvre the opposing party: Khusro trapped the Roman envoy John into discussing Suania, contrary to the wishes of Justin II, while the latter recovered his position by manoeuvring the Persian envoy Mebodes into prostrating himself before the throne.<sup>7</sup> The situation had to be critical before a ruler would admit inferiority by presenting himself as the son of his counterpart, as the exiled Khusro II did when appealing to Maurice in 590 and the senate when grovelling to Khusro on behalf of Heraclius in 615.<sup>8</sup> The rhetoric of kinship undoubtedly facilitated the alleged plea in the early fifth century by Arcadius to Yazdgard I to adopt the infant Theodosius II and then Kavadh's approach to Justinian to adopt Khusro that the Romans clumsily rejected (pp. 76–79).

The second case study deals with the Arab groups that occupied much of the territory between Rome and Persia to the south of the Euphrates (“Ethnography and Arabs between Persia and Rome”, pp. 81–86). Here a combination of subsidies, elevated titles, and shared Christian religion helped to align some groups with Rome, though doctrinal differences might complicate the last factor, and the innate Roman contempt for these unreliable elements is evident in Justin II's humiliation of Arabs in the retinue of the Persian envoy Mebodes.<sup>9</sup> The third study concerns the ‘steppe peoples’ beyond the Danube frontier, first the Huns and then the Avars (“Rome and the Steppe Peoples: Tables Turned”, pp. 86–93), with whom dealings involved regular Roman payments that dramatically increased in the 440s for the Huns, and then for the Avars in the 580 and 610s. The successful de-

6 Ioh. Mal. 17.10 (Zilgibi); 18.44 (Kavadh's letter). The latter passage is first quoted in full (p. 69), citing the books and section of the Australian translation (Melbourne 1986) and Thurn edition (Berlin 2000), but a few pages later (p. 76, with p. 290, n. 127) is briefly cited with the pagination of the old Bonn corpus edition.

7 Men. Prot. fr. 9.1.108–116; 9.3.50–118 (Blockley).

8 Theophyl. Sim. 4.11.11; Chron. Pasch. pp. 707–709 (Bonn).

9 Men. Prot. fr. 9.3.99–112 (Blockley).

mands of the outsiders demonstrated the fragility of assumptions of superiority that emperors attempted to bolster through a combination of exotic gifts and diplomatic ceremonial such as Justin II's reception of Avar envoys (pp. 90–93). Following these eastern case studies, the final part of the chapter considers the West (pp. 96–98), where the decline of imperial power in the fifth century transformed the submissive alignment of tribal groups into the assertive independence of successor states. Here it might have been interesting to examine the extent to which Cassiodorus' *Variae* demonstrate the continuation at the Ostrogothic court, the most Roman of successor states, of imperial traditions through titles and gift giving, as well as Constantinople's engagement with the Franks that combined cash, titles, and religious relics. In its conclusion (p. 98) the chapter is said to examine "an ethnographic discourse of subordination to Rome", though the details of diplomatic dealings are more ambivalent than this: parity was often the goal in exchanges with Persia and even Gothic leaders in the fourth century managed to force emperors to act on a premise of equality.<sup>10</sup>

The third chapter ("'Include Me Out': Ethnography, Settlement, and Law at the Edges of Empire", pp. 99–122) is focused on arrangements to place different groups of outsiders within the empire on varying conditions of subservience. Legal labels such as *dediticii*, *gentiles*, *laeti*, *auxilia*, and *foederati* were clearly understood by those responsible for agreeing terms and drafting legislation, but many of their nuances must remain opaque to us. Attempts to identify their remains in the archaeological record are doomed to failure in the absence of agreed markers, but Maas presents a useful summary of the primarily legal evidence for them (pp. 102–122). Provision of troops was expected of all groups, though in the case of the *laeti* this might have been subordinated to agricultural labour (pp. 113–118). Contrary to the chapter's title, settlement did not only occur near the frontiers: at the start of the fifth century Tribigild had access to manpower, probably Gothic, that had been settled in Phrygia, while 100,000 captives secured from Arzanene by Maurice in 578 were transported to Cyprus to work the land;<sup>11</sup> in neither case is the legal nature of the settlement specified by the historians who provide our only evidence for it. Additional military manpower was vital for Roman ar-

10 In 369 Athanaric made his agreement with Valens on a ship in the middle of the Danube rather than a ceremony on land where he would have had to prostrate himself: Amm. 27.5.9.

11 Tribigild: Soz. 8.4; Philostorg. 11.8; Maurice: Theophyl. Sim. 3.15.15.

mies and might be welcomed by panegyrists as a boon also to agriculture and tax-payers, though reliance on non-Roman troops rather than the supposedly traditional national army was decried by those who saw this as a critical weakness.<sup>12</sup> Discussion of the Isaurians as inhabitants of the empire with a penchant for violence would have been an interesting complement to this chapter, an example to join the Tzani of the ethnographic treatment of insiders; neither Isaurians nor Armenians, another national group of major military significance in the sixth and seventh centuries, secure an entry in the Index.

The next two chapters form a pair in examining facets of determinism, first astral (“Divine Providence and the Power of the Stars”, pp. 123–156) and then environmental (“The Controlling Hand of the Environment”, pp. 157–184). Belief in the power of heavenly bodies to influence or control human affairs long antedated Roman control of the Mediterranean and generated intellectual disagreement in the second century BC as Greek thinkers reacted to Babylonian ideas. Maas surveys these antecedents (pp. 129–132) before advancing to the arguments of Ptolemy in the second century AD that astrology had an influence on both individuals and communities. People were naturally interested in the future and so tools to secure insight, whether oracles or horoscopes, were popular, but the latter were subject to imperial legislation because of the danger that they might be used against emperors. Christianity heightened opposition to astrology, since the allocation of power to the stars was a clear challenge to the omnipotence of God, so that to counter it Christian writers drew on the Hellenistic *nomina barbarika*, “the customs of nations”, argument, namely the fact that a nation may have the same laws and customs despite its individual members having a myriad of different horoscopes. For Christian use, this was first adapted by the Syriac ecclesiastic Bardaisan *circa* AD 200, who treated the diverse Christian population scattered across the empire as a nation that shared the same laws and practices despite living in a wide range of locations and under different zodiacal conditions. Bardaisan’s thinking, despite his subsequent condemnation for heresy, went on to influence Eusebius of Caesarea, Diodorus of Tarsus, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, authors who each receive individual treatment from Maas (pp. 137–148).

12 Welcome in panegyric: Them. or. 16, 211a–d. Hostility: Synes. or. regn. 14, 15; of course from the Republic onwards non-citizens had supplied the majority of troops in Roman armies as *auxilia*.

Discussion then turns to Justinian, who is presented as taking action against those practising astrology (pp. 151–152); although earlier legislation against astrology was indeed maintained in the Justinianic Code, the absence of specific condemnation of astrologers by the emperor himself might suggest caution about his own position. A less hostile attitude to astral matters on the part of the emperor would reduce the apparent paradox of Justinian’s willingness to co-opt the zodiac into his imagery (pp. 152–154). In the *Secret History* Procopius stated that “they” were hostile to astrologers, though in preceding paragraphs Justinian’s actions have been ascribed to “he” with the reason for switching to the plural being unclear, and it is the praetor rather than the emperor who uses astrology as a supplementary charge in order to ratchet up the punishment of lesser offenders:<sup>13</sup> perhaps Justinian encouraged him to do this, but that is not alleged by Procopius and it might just have been the result of administrative creativity, and official introducing reasons that he believed would appeal to the emperor. The interesting comment of Agathias in the context of the 557 earthquake that those “who were computing the movements and appearances of stars would hint at and intimate greater misfortunes and an almost collective overthrow of affairs” deserved to be prosecuted for impiety for diminishing the ability of “the higher power” to control affairs might have deserved discussion.<sup>14</sup> It might also have been noted that the Christian triumph over astrology did not end discussion of whether the future was fixed, since during the reign of Heraclius we have the earliest surviving example of work on the “Predestined Terms of Life”. Such discussions of whether the duration of a human life and the moment of death had been divinely fixed in advance revived in Christian form the Stoic paradox between determinism and free will.<sup>15</sup>

13 Proc. hist. 11.37.

14 Agath. hist. 5.5.3; there is another derogatory comment at 5.10.5 in connection with a return of bubonic plague, “the most ancient of the Egyptian oracles and those who are currently most expert among the Persians in the movements of the heavens say that in the endless ages cycles of certain lengths occur, that are now good and fortunate, now troublesome and unlucky, and that the present cycle is one of the worst and most unfortunate of those: therefore wars and riots in cities are occurring everywhere as a result, while pestilential incidents are constant and continuous.”

15 Theophylactus Simocates: *On Predestined Terms of Life*. Greek Text and English Translation by C. Garton and L. G. Westerink. Buffalo, NY 19785 (Arethusa Monographs 6).

The first half of the parallel chapter on environmental determinism is occupied by a survey of the back story of the concept from the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places* in the fifth century BC, through Aristotle, Vitruvius, and Strabo, to early Christian texts to culminate in hexaemeral works from the fourth century on the six days of God's creation: since God had made the heavens and the earth and everything in them, there was no room for independent agency for stars or nature (p. 170). Discussion then advances to the reign of Justinian with analysis of Procopius' passages first on the improvements to the behaviour of the Tzani and Heruls through conversion to Christianity and incorporation into the Roman polity bringing improvements and then on the plague as a catastrophic event that surpassed human explanations and so could only be referred to God (pp. 171–176). Earthquakes as another type of natural disaster might have been discussed, where, again, it would have been relevant to cite Agathias' account of the 551 quake that affected Egypt: he granted some plausibility to natural explanations, but concluded that "everything is arranged by a divine mind and superior plan".<sup>16</sup> Maas then turns to other sixth and seventh-century texts and authors, the Pseudo-Caesarius' *Eratopokriseis*, John of Ephesus, the *Chronicon Paschale*, and the *Strategicon* of Maurice (pp. 176–181), before discussing Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville in the West (pp. 181–183). The Christian God as creator of everything trumped any form of determinism, in what Maas refers to, with considerable justification, as "an ethnographic revolution" (pp. 124–125) while the orthodox emperor as God's representative on earth had the capacity to bring about improvements.

The next three chapters form a unit in the sense that they are all concerned with Christian ways of categorising peoples, through biblical descent, language, and doctrine. Chapter 6 ("Christianity and the Descendants of Noah", pp. 185–218) opens with an overview of these chapters, emphasising that they concern new ethnographies even if the authors involved did not see themselves as creating any sort of ethnography. The generations of the sons of Noah in Genesis 10, referred to as the "Table of Nations", offered Christian writers a convenient means of organising the diverse population of the world. Maas first discusses the seminal work known as the *Chronicle of Hippolytus*, which contains a section on the *Division of the World* that effectively aligned the inhabitants of the Roman world with the text of Genesis (pp.

16 Agath. hist. 2.15.9–13.

192–194). There follows a series of twelve descriptive ‘examples’, of whom some like Eusebius, Jerome, Augustine, and Isidore have been encountered in earlier chapters; the series then touches on the cartographic tradition of a tripartite division of the earth before moving to three texts with a connection to the Franks, namely the *Barbarus Scaligeri* (*Excerpta Latina Barbari*), the *Frankish Table of Nations*, and Fredegar’s *Chronicle*; there follow two cases from the Syriac world, Jacob of Edessa and Isho’dad of Merv, early-eighth and mid-ninth century authors respectively and so beyond the accepted terminus of Late Antiquity in 650. These first ten ‘examples’ are all presented briefly, in little more than an encyclopaedia entry. The final two are examined more extensively and interestingly. First, the tradition of Gog and Magog as an eschatological scourge in Jewish and Christian writings, including their role in the different versions of the Alexander Romance which recounts how the great conqueror penned them behind his Iron Gate in the Caucasus (pp. 204–211). The last example concerns the Arabs and how they came to adopt the ascription as Ishmaelites, the only one of the various peoples covered in the discussion to accept their biblical identity (pp. 211–217). There might have been a case for reviewing the evidence of non-biblical genealogical stories, for instance the myths about Ostrogothic descent in Jordanes or Bulgar origins in Theophanes,<sup>17</sup> as examples of other methods for integrating and explaining the distribution of related peoples.

Chapter 7 (“Babel and the Languages of the Earth”, pp. 219–235) moves from nations to words, but with the book of Genesis again as its start, in this case the story of the Tower of Babel that immediately follows the account of Noah and the Table of Nations. Babel explains how the single language spoken by Adam and Eve’s immediate descendants was transformed into the linguistic multiplicity of the world.<sup>18</sup> Whereas for the empire’s traditional educated elite Latin and Greek were the acceptable languages, indeed with Latin very much in second place for authors such as Libanius, Christianity elevated Jewish to equal status as the language of the Old Testament. The miracle of the apostles speaking in tongues at Pentecost validated the use of other languages for the dissemination of the Christian message, with Syriac, Armenian, and Gothic being amongst the early vehicles, while the connec-

17   Goths: Iord. Get. 14.79–80. Bulgars: Proc. bell. 8.5.1–4; Theophan. Conf. chron. AM 6171, pp. 357–358 (de Boor); Michael the Syrian 10.21.

18   Gen 11.

tion between nations and languages, namely between the Table of Nations and Babel, was confirmed by the belief that each had its guardian angel. Isidore of Seville is, again, a key figure in the interpretation and application of the Babel story.

The eighth chapter (“The New Ethnography of Christian Heresy”, pp. 236–260) examines a different criterion for distinguishing between communities, with heresy operating as an oppositional characteristic that was equivalent to the secular label of barbarian. The importance of orthodoxy to the empire’s success ensured that the secular power lined up behind efforts to reshape this ethnographic landscape even more urgently than Justinian acted to ‘civilise’ the Tzani. This was an entirely new approach to organising the world, one with profound implications for the fragmentation of the theoretically unified body of Christ that still reverberate today as different Christian groups grope their way towards possible communion.

The short conclusion (pp. 261–269) summarises the book’s themes, highlighting the issues of centrality and distance, both physical and conceptual, as well as the ways in which Christianity introduced a powerful new agent of change that reframed the principles and parameters of discussion. It ends with a plain restatement of the tripartite nature of ethnography’s gift, where its unreturnable offering to the modern world is particularly open-ended. In this last case, Maas might be accused of Eurocentric bias, since, regardless of the dominance of Europe and the West in recent centuries, Rome cannot be held responsible for all problematic attitudes in the modern world: other cultures with deep roots, for example Chinese and Persian, have provided their own gifts, in particular with regard to notions of superiority vis-a-vis outsiders. One question that might have been addressed is whether we should be talking about gifts rather than gift, since the legacy of ethnography from the Late Empire was not unitary. The impact of clerics such as Augustine, Isidore of Seville, and Bede, the last of whom is not mentioned, probably because he falls just outside the boundaries of Late Antiquity, ensured that biblical categories such as the Table of Nations, Tower of Babel, and heresy, as well as the refutation of determinism, influenced intellectual discussion in the West in the Middle Ages. A different tradition, or gift, conveyed the language of international diplomacy to later potentates, while specific categories designed in Roman law to regulate relationships became less relevant or even comprehensible to later generations. One could also expand on the extent to which the gifts were really those of conquering Rome. Clas-

sical ethnography and environmental determinism were Roman inheritances from the Greeks, astral determinism and the language of royal diplomacy came from the Middle East, while conquered Jews presented the biblical concepts of Noah's descendants and Babel. Only legal terms and attitudes to heresy were entirely Roman concepts. That said, whatever their origin, it was the transformation and blending of these factors within the empire that then conveyed them to subsequent generations.

One regret is that more was not said about the classical genre of ethnography in Late Antiquity. One relevant line of enquiry might have been to start with the most obvious formal manifestation of ethnography as a gift, the *De Administrando Imperio* that Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus had prepared for his son Romanus II, a work which presents a survey of the Byzantine world in the mid-tenth century as a basis for successful dealings with the empire's neighbours. Admittedly this is three centuries beyond the terminus of Late Antiquity, but the underlying attitude is not unlike that in Book 11 of the *Strategicon* of Maurice where ethnography is deployed as a guide for future military commanders. Thanks to a brilliant piece of detective work by Philip Rance we can see the *Strategicon* being used in the 630s as a working text by a serving commander who combined summary notes on relevant parts of the *Strategicon* with some supplementary material.<sup>19</sup> This tract, known as the "Müller fragment" or *De Militari Scientia*, is preserved immediately after the *Strategicon* in a collected volume of classical and Byzantine military texts for the encyclopaedic initiative of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. To belong in collection the author was probably a person of significance, one whose working notes deserved a place in the imperial archives, someone perhaps as exalted as Theodore, brother of Emperor Heraclius, or even Heraclius himself. We may here have an anticipation of the *De Administrando Imperio*, a bequest from one regime to another a generation later.

The late antique empire did not produce anything as sophisticated as the *De Administrando Imperio* but there are signs that the imperial administration in the sixth century had started to gather the sort of external ethnographic in-

19 P. Rance: The *De Militari Scientia* or Müller Fragment as a Philological Resource. Latin in the East Roman Army and Two New Latin Loanwords in Greek: *palmarium* and *\*recala*. In: *Glotta* 86, 2010, pp. 63–92, at p. 72. There is a new edition and Italian translation of this text in *Appunti di tattica (De militari scientia)*. Testo critico, traduzione e commento di I. Eramo. Besançon 2018, and an English translation will be included in Rance's forthcoming study of the *Strategicon*.

formation that could have underpinned such a study. Emperors were capable of looking beyond or around Sasanid Persia, with Justinian encouraging the Axumites to challenge Persian domination of the silk trade by exploring sea routes to India,<sup>20</sup> while a fragment from Menander Protector shows Justin II at work, questioning the Sogdian leader Maniakh who had been sent by the Turkic khagan Sizabul to discuss trade in silk: Justin asks about the growth of Turkic power in central Asia and the origins of the Avars, with the answers probably being logged in the palace archives as well as recorded by the historian.<sup>21</sup> The dispatch of embassies to Axum, whose actions were recorded at length by the envoy Nonnosus,<sup>22</sup> was probably an initiative to gather information. In Europe emperors understood the nature of relations between Kutrigurs and Utigurs, Gepids and Lombards, and Slavs and Antes, while further west knowledge of Frankish affairs enabled Justinian and Maurice, admittedly with little or no success, to use the kingdoms to influence affairs in Italy. The role of emperors and diplomacy in the formation of the empire's ethnographic dossier is not considered in the volume. A different omission that might have prompted an interesting discussion is the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes,<sup>23</sup> a work that attempts to relate the arrangement of the heavens to that of the Jewish tabernacle.

In such a work covering a multitude of specialist areas there are, inevitably, minor slips; I note those that I have picked up in case they can be corrected in a revised edition or on-line text:

p. 70. The Endless Peace of 532 was made with Khusro I, not Kavadh (p. 70) even though the latter had been involved in the earlier stages of negotiation.

p. 71. Justin II, despite his aversion to payments for peace, must have given the Persians 90,000 *nomismata*, about 1,250 pounds of gold, in 567/568 as the second tranche of payments stipulated under the 50-years peace of 561/

20 The unsuccessful initiative is reported in Proc. bell. 1.19–20.

21 Men. Prot. fr. 10.1.68–88 (Blockley).

22 A summary of Nonnosus' account is preserved in Phot. bibl. 3, and probably underlies the information in Ioh. Mal. 18.15.

23 Cosmas Indicopleustes: Topographie chrétienne. 3 vols. Introduction, texte critique, illustration, traduction et notes par W. Wolska-Conus. Paris 1968–1973 (Sources Chrétiennes 141/159/197).

562, while the 45,000 *nomismata* paid for a truce in 574 represents about 625 pounds of gold, not 450.

p. 80. The deposition of Maurice in 602 is presented as being a “dozen years later” than Kavadh’s marriage link with the Hephthalites more than a century before.

p. 96. Ammianus’ presentation of Alamanni kings as terrified in the presence of Caesar Julian might not be “undoubtedly true”, but rather part of the historian’s construction of his hero’s image.

p. 151. In the paragraph on Theodoret the Council of Chalcedon is dated to 415 not 451, while he is surely best-known for his *Ecclesiastical History* and collection of information on the monks of Syria (*Religious History*).

pp. 176–177. It is unlikely that the author of Pseudo-Caesarius’ *Eratopokeriseis* was both a member of the Sleepless community and a Miaphysite, since that monastery was resolutely Chalcedonian in Justinian’s reign.

p. 177. It is unclear why Justinian’s attempts at achieving doctrinal reconciliation should be called “calamitous”; they were unsuccessful in the East and the Three Chapters initiative and the Council of Constantinople led to schism in the West, though the latter was eventually soothed.

p. 178, line 7. Read ‘us’ for “use”.

p. 179. John of Ephesus was the titular Miaphysite bishop of Ephesus in Asia, not a bishop in Syria; his comments on the Slavs reflected their extensive incursions in the 570s rather than in the reign of Justinian. The speculation of Warren Treadgold that the anonymous author of the *Chronicon Paschale* was an educated layman in the imperial bureaucracy is far from certain: the balance of material in the chronicles heavily skewed towards the Bible, while the author’s interest in dating Church feasts, and his use of Macedonian rather than Roman dates all point to a cleric.

p. 189. Chapters 9 to 11 of Genesis are referred to as “verses” before the discussion reverts to the normal term.

p. 203. Jacob of Edessa’s dates are usually given as 640 to 708 rather than the implausible “540–680”.

p. 252. Arius was an Alexandrian presbyter, never a bishop.

p. 255. Justinian did not begin his attack on Ostrogothic Italy in 534. The first move was against Sicily and Dalmatia in 535, to be followed by Belisarius' invasion of Italy in 536. Unlike the Vandal campaign in 533 when the actions of the 'Arian' Gelimer against the majority Nicene population had been a major factor in Justinian's decision to attack, with regard to the Ostrogoths it was the breakdown of negotiations about a peaceful transfer of authority that led to war.

p. 257. It is Monotheletism, not Miaphysitism, that is the heretical belief that there was a single will in the incarnate Christ.

p. 313, n. 34. 'was' for "were".

p. 328, n. 11. The note on the sense of "climate" provides important clarification, but seems to have little resonance with its cue (p. 159 first paragraph) where climate is not mentioned.

p. 334, n. 151. The name of the author of the Ph.D. dissertation "Ethnika in Byzantine Military Treatises" is not supplied, so that the work might appear to belong to Rance rather than John E. Witta.

Finally, I permit myself one bit of nit-picking: "disinterest" (p. 47) means lack of bias not lack of interest.

However, such an impressive work deserves a positive conclusion: Maas has given us an ambitious and stimulating book that presents the legacies of Late Antiquity in new ways through a bold approach to the varied forms of ethnography. My suggestions of topics that might have been included reflect a wish that he had applied his insights to this material as well. Individual aspects or people will undoubtedly receive close attention and this may lead to the re-evaluation of some issues, but it is unlikely that anyone will have the knowledge and confidence to attempt such an overarching synthesis to the diversity of ethnographies in the later Roman world.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Michael Whitby: Rezension zu: Michael Maas: The Conqueror's Gift. Roman Ethnography and the End of Antiquity. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press 2025. In: Plekos 27, 2025, S. 535–549 (URL: <https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2025/r-maas.pdf>).

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