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tions with the present is highly revealing in terms of the ways in which the field has changed, for example in the project's current focus on investigating the wider landscape of the sanctuary, but Siapkas has little time for such nuances.

Part three turns to classical art history, first presenting an overview of this field's development from the rise of connoisseurship to Panofsky's iconology, followed by individual chapters that outline the substantial bodies of scholarship on ancient vases and sculpture, the two media that research traditionally has focused on. Siapkas critically engages with the deeply embedded structures of research on ancient vases, including the Beazley paradigm's focus on the identification of artists, as well the masters of classical sculpture. In his account of *Kopienkritik* (a topic that confusingly was also covered in the first volume of the series), he ignores the important role of manuscript studies as a model for the development of this method. Siapkas rightly criticises the singular focus on masterworks in some art-historical scholarship, but he completely ignores the substantial body of scholarship on the social history of art that developed in the mid-20th century under the influence of Marxism, notably the works of Ranucchio Bianchi Bandinelli. Although these developments will apparently be covered in a future volume of the series, what we are treated to here is in many ways a caricature of the art-historical perspective in classical archaeology as it is applied in the 21st century.

With part four, Siapkas changes course and turns to various aspects of the ideological and political uses of antiquity, another potentially massive topic. Here, Siapkas focuses on National Socialist and Fascist scholarship (and shades of such scholarship), concluding with a chapter on the work of archaeologists during military conflicts that blurs the lines between scholarship, diplomacy and espionage. His discussion of the culture of copies in Fascist museum practices is fascinating, as is the rhetorical construction of Hitler as Perikles. However, there is little here that adds new dimensions to a topic that has been covered in much more incisive fashion in so much other recent scholarship. Individual discussions move even further away from the chronological outline of the book and turn to very recent developments in scholarship and even contemporary politics, including the rise of the far-right Golden Dawn movement in present-day Greece.

The qualities of this book lie mostly in its sweeping overviews rather than its penetrative analysis. In many cases, the chronological sequencing stifles the thematic and diachronic discussions that would have provided a clearer and more precise overview of the present state of the field. Scattered across the entire book are observations on various consequences of the "theoretical atherosclerosis" (p. 118) of classical studies. Burdened by its traditions (with all of the inherent weaknesses that follow, including but not limited to scientific racism, positivism, naïve realism and inductionism, all diagnosed by Siapkas), the field has seemingly limited itself to such a narrow and outdated theoretical basis that it is unable to move forward. Siapkas encourages us to be aware of these problems and discuss their implications for scholarship, and he is right to point out that in many cases the methodological conservatism of the field actively limits the analytical possibilities of our material. His call for more research on the history of the field and what he calls "situated scholarship" that contextualises current approaches within their social, political and epistemological context is thus very much to be welcomed. Generally, however, this reviewer is considerably more upbeat about the adaptability (and eclecticism) of classical studies as well as the potential of the field for theoretical and methodological progress. In short, what is missing from Siapkas' volume is a more positive and more constructive vision of the future of the field of classical studies in general.

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W. Scheidel, *Escape from Rome. The failure of empire and the road to prosperity,* Princeton: Princeton University Press 2019. xvii + 670 pp., 56 figures and 5 tables.
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Walter Scheidel has high aims and provocative claims in his new book *Escape from Rome*. The central argument evolves around the hypothesis that Europe's "escape" from the Roman Empire is the best thing that ever happened to Europe (and possibly even the world) because it eventually set up the right conditions for the Great Divergence, the Industrial Revolution and the leap forward to modernity. Instead of the traditional negative stand on the collapse of the Roman Empire, Scheidel views the collapse positively. He clearly sets out to start a debate by taking an unusual standpoint for which he presents persuasive arguments. The book is structured to build up the argumentation for his hypothesis by applying a comparative method and the testing of counterfactual scenarios in chronological order, starting in the 8th century BC Mediterranean up to the start of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe in the 18th century AD. Throughout the book, Europe is consistently compared to China to strengthen the argument that the Great Divergence was only possible in a fragmented and competitive polycentral environment such as Europe—where unified central imperial authority was missing since the fall of the Roman Empire, and where it would

never return. China is placed in contraposition to Europe as an example of the opposite end of the spectrum—a region with long-lasting large-scale empires.

The book is divided into five parts, each containing several chapters. The introduction (pp. 1–27) introduces the goals and methods of the book, the latter being discussed in more detail in chapter 1. Scheidel considers what the Great Escape is and why it is important to understand the conditions that kick-started the leap forward to modernity, focusing on why it started in Europe and not elsewhere in the (Old) World.

Part I—'The European Anomaly' (chapter 1—'Patterns of Empire', pp. 31–48) explains in more detail how historical empires can be measured. The basic measurement is the proportion of the population in a given macro-region that was ruled by the most populous polity in that region. Effectively, this is used as a measure of monopolistic imperial power to map patterns of empire. These patterns are presented in graphs, visualizing historical and comparative patterns but foremost showing the uniqueness of Rome in a European setting but not in a world-wide perspective.

Part II—'Why Rome?' discusses the imperiogenesis of the Roman Empire from three different perspectives. Scheidel argues that imperial state formation depends on two factors: an expansionistic core (chapter 2—'Core', pp. 51–88) and a periphery susceptible to domination (chapter 3—'Periphery', pp. 89–109). The final chapter (chapter 4—'Counterfactuals', pp. 110–123) offers counterfactual scenarios, by discussing the odds that internal or external challenges could have derailed Rome's path to Mediterranean dominance.

Part III—'Why only Rome?' is divided in chapter 5—'From Justinian to Frederick' (pp. 127–173) and chapter 6—'From Genghis Khan to Napoleon' (pp. 174–215). These two chapters discuss the long period between the end of the Roman Empire and the 18th century AD. Scheidel argues for a clear break leading to fragmentation. According to Scheidel external threats and climate change combined with the plague led to the fall of Rome. This is followed by a discussion on possible but always unsuccessful options for successors of Rome, mixed with counterfactual scenarios. This historical overview and the counterfactuals all contribute to the central argument of Rome being a European anomaly by showing that no other historical European kingdoms could possibly ever have reached the same dominance within Europe.

Part IV—'The First Great Divergence' is when the book really starts to take off, by posing that Europe was always less likely to be ruled by very large empires. This part covers arguments why the Great Divergence was not only a break between the Roman and post-Roman period but also a break between the subsequent state formation processes in Europe in comparison to state formation in the other parts of the Old World, especially China. Chapter 7—'From convergence to divergence' (pp. 219–258), provides the necessary background information for China. China and Europe were initially on a very similar track, with the rise and fall of the first large empires around roughly the same time. However, China continued to be the birthplace of many more large-scale empires, while Europe fragmented into smaller kingdoms after AD 500. Arguments for this divergence in this chapter focus on organizational differences and changes in the taxation system, military mobilization and cohesion of the elite groups. While in Europe the Roman taxation system waned, also affecting military mobilization and elite competition, the Chinese empire centralized taxation, created a unified elite culture and maintained high mobilization rates under the constant pressure of raiding steppe tribes. Chapter 8—'Nature' (pp. 259–306), presents the hypothesis that geography and ecology constrain the scope and scale of social interaction and therefore the size of empires. Europe, with a segmented geography and varied ecology versus China with the Great Plains and more homogenous ecology, setting the framework for divergent trajectories. Scheidel singles out the location of steppes as being one of the crucial factors in large-scale state formation. He sees a correlation between military inputs—with the strong cavalries of steppe tribes forming a constant threat to agricultural empires—and scale of state formation. Political outcomes are therefore contingent on geography and one-sided threats from the steppe. Rome is the exception to the rule as the only large empire that did not form on the fringes of the Eurasian steppe. Chapter 9—'Culture' (pp. 307–334), starts with the statement that culture is conditioned, shaped and reinforced by nature (pp. 307–308). Thereby Scheidel clearly prioritizes nature over culture, with culture being a function to state formation and thus of secondary importance. It concludes that there is a complex interaction between physical, institutional and cultural properties associated with and conducive to large-scale empire formation. Variation in circumstances led to varied but robust outcomes in Chinese large-scale empire building versus European fragmentation because of the overdetermination of physical, institutional and cultural factors.

Part V—'From the First to the Second Great Divergence' argues that the polycentrism of Europe is key to explain the Second Great Divergence and Industrial Revolution. At the same time, polycentrism is rooted in the developments discussed in Part IV. The symmetrical interstate competition and independency of early European states fostered the right circumstances for the leap forward. This is opposed to the focus of hegemonic empires, like China, on maintenance of power and thereby stagnation and conservatism. This is argued along three lines: institutions (chapter 10—'Institutions', pp. 337–419), external resources and exploitation (chapter 11—'New Worlds', pp. 420–471) and innovation (chapter 12—'Understanding', pp. 472–502). The North Sea region and especially Britain are singled out as forerunners in the process towards

the Industrial Revolution as a consequence of a mixture of open, flexible institutions encouraging innovation, combined with mercantile protectionism, relatively open political structures and favourable fiscal circumstances profitable for the whole population, all driven by constant competition and warfare with other European states. This is the opposite of stable and crystallized Chinese institutions where incentives for innovation are largely missing. Separate elements of this argument are further extended in chapters 11 and 12.

Chapter 12 also presents the final argument that Europe's "multifaceted polycentrism" (p. 491) was the driver of the (Second) Great Divergence and Industrial Revolution, made possible by the "Escape from Rome" and the lack of enduring hegemonic empire in Europe. This created polycentrism between and within European states, with causal linkage between polycentrism and transformative developmental outcomes leading towards the leap forward to modernity. The 'Epilogue' (pp. 503–527) puts forwards and dismisses some contrary traditional arguments through the use of counterfactuals, by discussing Roman legacies. It focuses on (residual) cultural features shared among the fragmented European states, such as the Latin language and Christianity.

As reflected in the foregoing paragraphs, *Escape from Rome* presents a very elaborate, thought-provoking and persuasive argument on why the failure of Rome "may have been our biggest lucky break since an errant asteroid cleared away dinosaurs" (p. 19). The breadth and in-depth knowledge needed to write a book like this is admirable and takes courage, especially in a field where many scholars view the decline and fall of the Roman Empire as regrettable. Nevertheless, Scheidel does not shy away from bold claims and is certainly convinced of his own line of reasoning. Scheidel furthermore accuses historians of a general lack of interest in the reasons behind the Great Divergence (pp. 19–20) and he calls it a "great loss" that historians do not emphasize the use of counterfactuals, while, according to Scheidel, all historians do is counterfactual reasoning (pp. 23–24).

Although I am persuaded by Scheidel's main argument, there are three (minor) points that raise questions. Firstly, the data and measurements he presents in chapter 1—'Patterns of Empire'. Albeit that Scheidel does discuss general problems with population estimates and calculations of historical GDPs, he is convinced that "my estimates are generally unlikely to be wrong to an extent that it would affect the overall shape of the pattern" (p. 33). Furthermore, he relies heavily on one source (McEvedy & Jones, *Atlas of world population history*, London 1978) for his reconstruction. The majority of a more nuanced discussion of source problems and difficulties of reconstructing past demographics is delegated to a technical note section (pp. 533–535). The danger lies in the fact that any presentation of numbers and graphs runs the risk of being taken at face-value. Measurements embody an air of truth and hide nuanced arguments or in fact counterfactual scenarios. Although I do understand the need for measurement for the sake of comparison, it would have made the chapter stronger to incorporate estimates based on high and low counts and to indicate the reliability of the data—especially for periods and regions where data is largely lacking, which is hidden in the graphs. This could have been achieved by incorporating the technical notes into the chapter.

Secondly, Scheidel is clearly inspired by New Institutional Economics. His chapter on institutions is one of the longest and most detailed in the book. But in Part IV he emphasized the overarching shaping and constraining power of nature over culture. However, if culture is secondary to state formation because nature is the primary underlying force, what is than the relationship between nature and institutions? I would consider institutions to be part of culture, as the embodiment of state formation processes and thereby also shaping future trajectories. This is also argued by Scheidel, who states for example that trade and European expansion was made possible by the very existence of institutions in chapter 11. Scheidel's position on this relationship is however not very clear besides that he sees nature and institutions as both contributing (but possible not equally?) to state formation.

Lastly, there is the odd focus on the North Sea region and especially Britain in the last part of the book. Scheidel argues that this region is where the Second Great Divergence and Industrial Revolution started because of the more dramatic collapse of Roman era institutions here in comparison to the other parts of Europe. This facilitated the "escape from Rome" from the start, creating early onwards the best conditions for a leap forward. However, did Britain and the Netherlands really have to escape from Rome to begin with? Because both countries were never fully part of the Roman Empire, it is slightly uncomfortable to argue that they had to escape from Rome at all. Maybe the fact that the North Sea region was always on the periphery, first of the Roman Empire and later of the Frankish, Habsburg and Napoleonic empires too, created the perfect conditions for developments towards greater prosperity. Along the same line, it has been argued that the success of Rome is (partly) because of its initial location on the periphery of empires in the Eastern Mediterranean (see for example Eckstein, *Mediterranean anarchy, interstate war, and the rise of Rome*, Berkeley 2006).

With *Escape from Rome* Scheidel has achieved an impressive and persuasive book, one that is definitely thought-provoking and thereby hopefully will start a new debate on the consequences of the end of the Roman Empire.

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