

Britannia

<http://journals.cambridge.org/BRI>

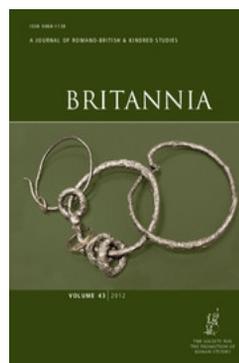
Additional services for **Britannia**:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



***Rome and its Frontiers: the Dynamics of Empire.* By C.R. Whittaker. Routledge, London, 2004. Pp. x + 246. Price: £55.00. ISBN 0 415 31200 0.**

Andrew Gardner

Britannia / Volume 37 / November 2006, pp 520 - 521

DOI: 10.1017/S0068113X00002154, Published online: 01 March 2010

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0068113X00002154

How to cite this article:

Andrew Gardner (2006). Britannia, 37, pp 520-521 doi:10.1017/S0068113X00002154

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

Rome and its Frontiers: the Dynamics of Empire. By C.R. Whittaker. Routledge, London, 2004. Pp. x + 246. Price: £55.00. ISBN 0 415 31200 0.

Whittaker's 1994 book *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: a Social and Economic Study* took a fresh look at an old problem. His new volume is essentially a collection of articles produced since that point which deal with similar issues, most of which have already been published. As W. acknowledges in the Preface, these chapters retain a good deal of their original identity, and as with all such collections the result does somewhat lack in coherence. Nonetheless, his thoughtful and insightful comments on frontiers are always worth reading, and the book therefore provides much to consider. There are also several key themes that run across a number of the chapters and which, while not quite amounting to an explicit argument, do convey a sophisticated view of the Roman frontiers, the evidence we have available to understand them, and their modern relevance. Such a view is very welcome on a topic which continues to be a central part of Roman studies.

The book contains ten chapters, the first being a fairly general introduction to the papers chosen for inclusion and to the broad current debates about frontiers. The rest include discussions of military problems ('grand strategy' and supply), sex and gender relations, Roman perceptions of space, the relationships between the Empire and India, and a range of historiographical issues. Their order is neither chronological by original publication date nor in terms of Roman periods, but seems rather to be thematic. This works reasonably well, although there is some repetition of material (especially between chs 6, 'Sex on the Frontiers' and 7, on Roman views of India), as well as some slightly jarring shifts in style where the original articles were clearly written for different audiences.

The major themes which run through all of the chapters include, of course, W.'s well-established interest in social and economic relations on and across the frontiers, in addition to ancient and modern historiography, and the need to try and understand fundamental aspects of the Roman world-view if the frontiers are also to be understood. At a general level, the book's main insights for me are those to do

with the complex relationship between past and present views of territoriality, ethnicity, and boundaries. Chs 9 and 10 discuss the evidence for fluid cultural interactions across the Roman frontiers in relation to concerns with national boundaries and immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and address the ways in which selective appropriations of Roman history have been deployed in these more recent times. The discrepancies between stereotypes and experience in both contexts are carefully and succinctly drawn out.

The benefit of this kind of collection, however, is that different readers will find different parts most useful. For me, W.'s discussions of the historiography of late antique invasions (ch. 3), of the gendering of imperialism (ch. 6), and of the relationship of itineraries to Roman mental maps are all highly pertinent to current debates on cultural interaction across the diversity of Roman world, while the sections on the economics of frontier-supply (ch. 5) and trade with India (ch. 8) seem more limited by a narrower systemic perspective. The breadth of W.'s own interests is impressive, and his ability to integrate different sources of evidence within a critical framework is commendable.

Nonetheless, explicit discussion of recent interpretative developments in archaeology is largely lacking, and this is perhaps the book's main weakness. The discipline seems to be mainly a source of data, rather than ideas which might be of use to more historically-minded scholars; this is also reflected in a somewhat selective bibliography. This problem is partly a consequence of the circumstances of the book's composition, and it would be unfair to criticise *Rome and its Frontiers* for lacking in synthesis when it is clearly not intended to be synthetic. Even so, new understandings of the dynamics of Roman imperialism which have emerged in the last decade from a range of sources ought to have received more attention than they do, at least in the introductory chapter. For scholars working on such processes, though, this book will certainly provide many useful ideas, as well as a number of highly pertinent reminders of why Roman frontiers, and the Roman Empire, are of relevance to some of the most significant problems of the modern world.

Institute of Archaeology, University College London

ANDREW GARDNER