

Another possibility is suggested in a perceptive essay by Bogdan Chiu, though. What if the idea to build Moldovan national identity “upon a void, upon an absence,” so clearly documented by Rabinovich’s work, is nothing but a study of the increasing impotence of the museum as an institution capable of delivering a meaningful social, educational, and/or political effect (P. 171)? Could it be that this active “production” of missing links in the nation’s history, this constant preoccupation with loss and absence is also a sign of the museum’s own demise, a gesture of the museum’s own self-distancing – both from history and from its audience? These questions remain pretty much unanswered in the book. But by pushing them to the fore *Museutopia* invites us to rethink the ability of the “military-museum complex” to play a crucial role in producing and sustaining national identities today.

*Museutopia* opens up a promising field of inquiry and form of research. Unlike the majority of recently published inventories of socialist memorabilia, the photos in *Museutopia* are accompanied by a series of reflections and interviews that helpfully contextualize the collected materials, eliciting meanings and associations that might not have been apparent otherwise. In fact, the photo collection is framed – literally and metaphorically – by two kinds

of texts. The two interviews with the author conducted respectively by the Russian art-critic Victor Misiano (“The Gaze, Diaspora, and Trauma”) and the Dutch scholar Huub van Baar (“Out of Place: Haunting Pasts, Withering Presents”) precede Rabinovich’s photographs. In both interviews, Rabinovich is prodded by his interlocutors into locating his project within different sets of references. Thus, Misiano – deeply steeped in the language of the visual theory of the 1990s – invited Rabinovich to think of his photographic research as an example of the diasporic gaze of a traumatized artist (P. 21). In turn, van Baar, informed by critical museum studies, pushed the photographer to contemplate the role of museumification in the nationalizing of history.

The two short essays that follow the photo collection are structured as an afterword, presenting somewhat opposite views. Stefan Rusu, a Moldova-born artist and curator, outlines in his “History on the Move,” what is by now a well-familiar narrative, in which the rewriting of recent history is presented as a step – unavoidable if not necessary – on the way “towards a new “European” identity” (P. 165). Writing from a different theoretical position, Bogdan Chiu, a Romanian cultural critic and theorist, in his complex essay “Modern Museum or Museum of Modernity,” suggests reading Rabinovich’s project not so much as the story of a par-

ticular national tradition but rather as an example of a much larger trend: a striving toward “historic innoculation,” a desire to maintain a subject position “at once on the border and between borders” (P. 177).

Taken together, the photos and the texts produce in *Museutopia* a refreshingly hybrid result: the visual documentation of documents, dispassionately performed by Rabinovich, is emotionally recharged in interviews and essays. Published by Alauda Publications, a new publishing house based in Amsterdam, *Museutopia* is a successful example of the productive cooperation of a thoughtful artist, innovative scholars, and adventurous editors. It would be great to see this type of intervention in the studies of post-Communist identity and history politics continue.



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Kimberly Kagan (Ed.), *The Imperial Moment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). xii+250 pp. Index, Bibliographical references. ISBN: 978-0-674-03587-4.

Is America an empire? After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, critics of American foreign policy have often pointed out that the unilateral use of American military force on the world stage resembles the behavior of past empires. While the term is not part of the American mainstream narrative, this inconvenient question still awaits an answer. The very fact that the question on the imperial analogy is raised points to the transformation processes that marked the end of the Cold War, and namely, the expansion of American international influence. Whether the current world is a unipolar one or not, matters less, since scholars still struggle to grasp the nature of the hegemon. Internationally, the United States is still the dominant military power, outspending the next ten countries combined, but, domestically, political actors constantly refer to America’s economic decline, and some of them ask for military spending cuts. This declinist theme is a recurrent one in American politics mirrored even in the 2012 presidential debates. Is the United States at the peak of its power on the global stage or is the unipolar moment gone?

The ambitious volume edited by Kimberly Kagan attempts a herculean feat; it raises, explores, and answers a host of intriguing questions related to this by now very popular imperial analogy. Kagan, however, suggests that *the United States should be compared to emergent empires*. It is the transition to an empire that is of interest here. The term *imperial moment* refers to this transition. It should be noted that from the very beginning the volume focuses on the political and military aspects of imperialism leaving aside the economic and some of the cultural dimensions of empires. This might come as a disappointment for Marxist historians studying economic imperialism, or for historians studying imperial institutions from a cultural perspective, but it is a methodological decision that aims at setting clear boundaries for the volume.

Another methodological decision refers to the definition of empire. Given the diversity of meanings ascribed to the term, Kagan states in the introduction that “this book does not offer a single definition or typology of empires” (P. 7). The term empire had different meanings and purposes in various historical and regional contexts; Kagan rightly emphasizes that many historians are tempted to adopt a teleological view and regard the emergence of empires as the culmination of an inevitable path toward empire. Hence, even

though a single definition of empire is not provided, the volume highlights and focuses on *two necessary dimensions* of empire, and thus of the imperial moment. The first one is related to the projection of power abroad, namely, the situation when a state begins to issue orders to other autonomous states with the certainty that those orders will be obeyed without the constant use of force (P. 173). That is how the powerful state eliminates the ambiguity of informal domination. The second dimension stems from the first one and refers to the domestic narrative. It is at this point that culture enters the picture. The authors try to pinpoint the various cultural and linguistic forms that suggest that the elites in a specific context embraced an imperial identity. More specifically, the authors look at the moment when state elites begin self-identifying with an empire, and the official title of the ruler includes the term “emperor” in one of its regional or historical forms. Both are required elements of imperialism, but the second one is grounded in the first. This definitional choice seems to give preference to the relational understanding of empires, even though it tries to mitigate the tension between the two divergent traditions in the study of empires by including the second element.

Here are just a few of the pertinent questions singled out by Kagan in the introduction and the conclu-

sion of the book: “Do powerful states inevitably become empires? Do particular decisions or events, either alone or in series, cause that transition? [...] Do policy makers have a choice about whether their state is or becomes an empire? When, or in response to what events, does the process of becoming an empire become irreversible? If the process is not reversible, why not? If it is, why do emergent empires not revert to non-imperial states?” (Pp. 7 and 169). To answer the questions above, six cases were selected based on the bold assumption that “rather than compare America with empires at their height, we ought to compare America with emerging empires” (P. 6). This selection criterion is a reply to those who claim that military preponderance and the establishment of imperial institutions are synchronous. Instead, the authors suggest that there is a significant time lag between the two moments. The emergent empires included in the volume are the Athenian Empire in the fifth century BC (Loren J. Samons II), Rome in the Middle Republic (Arthur M. Eckstein), Great Britain (Nicholas Canny), Qing China (Pamela Kyle Crossley), imperial Russia (Paul Bushkovitch), and the United States (Frank Ninkovich). The authors do not advance new theories of imperialism, but instead use their expertise and draw on the existing literature in order to identify

the two dimensions of the imperial moment mentioned above. Given that each of the six authors narrates centuries of pre-imperial and imperial history based on different bibliographies, and that on average each chapter is only twenty-five pages long, sometimes it becomes difficult to follow the theoretical “storyline.”

The chapter on Athens illuminates the complex relation between democracy and empire. It suggests that a democratic regime does not stand in contradiction with an extramural political order that is highly hierarchical. The Athenian case shows that empires are not tied to any political regime. Athenians did not encounter any discomfort in exacting tribute from other Greeks. In other words, Athenians did not oppose the empire because they benefited from it and perceived it as a source of wealth. Samons II shows that the Athenian democratic empire that emerged after the Delian League, which was a voluntary alliance against the Persian threat, became a tool of Athenian hegemony. The Nasians and the Tasiens, who attempted to leave the League were brought back by force and compelled to pay a tribute. Installing governments amenable to their wishes, exacting tribute, and military punishment were common tools used by the Athenians to command subordination. In exchange, they claimed to provide protection.

When discussing the Roman case, Eckstein follows Michael Doyle's famous classification of states based on asymmetries of power and differentiates between empire (full control over domestic and foreign policies of other states), hegemony (control over foreign policy), and spheres of influence (limits imposed on foreign policy). Reflecting on the Roman imperial moment, Eckstein applies the theoretical framework proposed by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, who studied the informal aspects of British imperialism. Eckstein's focus is on relations and degrees of formal and informal control between states. Of interest here is the notion of an *informal* empire, namely, a situation where a state extends its power "in more subtle forms – prestige, cajolery, and threat – enforced to be sure, by the occasional military expedition" (P. 37). The two imperial moments identified by Eckstein in the Roman case (i.e., the incorporation of Syracuse in 211 BC and that of the Greek states in the East in the 140s BC) were preceded by ambiguity regarding their subordinate status. Moreover, the Romans were not jubilating at the idea of formally incorporating the Greek states as part of the empire. Even though they were literally invited by some of the local elites to intervene and stay, the Roman Senate often chose to withdraw the troops and maintain an informal empire in the Eastern Mediterranean

region. The local state elites in the Roman sphere of influence were usually divided between notables loyal to Rome and pro-independence activists. The former were in favor of collaboration, while the latter wanted more independence vis-à-vis the empire. Eckstein suggests that this fracturing of the indigenous elites is similar to processes observed by Gallagher and Robinson in colonial settings in Asia and Africa in the late nineteenth century.

Most scholars would agree that Great Britain's rise began with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Paradoxically, Canny notes that the Protestant English elites defined themselves as anti-imperialist. Initially, the continuous expansion of private trade and the accompanying colonization process were not perceived as imperialist activities, but rather privately pursued goals. It is true that the rationalizations focused on the religious and civilizing aspects of colonization, *la mission civilisatrice*. The sponsoring of public plantations in Ireland was only the prelude for what was going to happen in the New World. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century that the term "empire" began to be used to describe the most powerful polity in the British Isles, and only during the eighteenth century does imperial terminology come to encompass colonization, as well. As Canny puts it "the term [i.e., empire]

came after the event" (P. 73). To a great extent, the British Empire was an empire of trade, although the creation of public plantations (i.e., colonization) in Ireland was clearly a political strategy. The American colonies populated by British subjects demanding the same rights as the British citizens back home turned out to be an Achilles' heel for London. The colonists rebelled against the alleged tyranny of the metropolis and won the war, but as Canny notes, the British defeat in North America helped consolidate its influence in other parts of the world.

Crossley's chapter on Qing China (1636–1912) reveals the constellation of alliances and the diversity of populations supporting Jurchen Nurgaci in his attempt to take over Ming China. In spite of the Great Wall, the Eurasian conception of emperorship had a tremendous influence on the way the Qing dynasty portrayed itself. Nurgaci, the founding father of China's last dynasty initially emulated the Mongolian khans. The imperial moment in this case seems to have been the conquering of Liaodong by the Jin state founded by Nurgaci. However, it was Nurgaci's son, Hung Taiji, who was officially crowned as the first Qing emperor. As Crossley mentions the Qing Empire emerged from a state on the periphery (P. 107). To justify the rule of the Jurchens, a formerly peripheral subordinated group, new histories

and genealogies were invented or rewritten. The Qing Empire successfully constructed and defined the new imperial identity – the Manchu identity. Based on the Jurchen identity, the one at the origins of the Qing dynasty, the new Manchu identity was supposed to simplify the complexity of personal histories. Three official languages (Mongol, Chinese, and Manchu) were used by the new imperial bureaucracy, which was a continuation of the old Ming bureaucracy. Key here is the empire's initial capacity to absorb all kinds of populations. As Crossley puts it,

Like the Ottomans and the Romanovs, the Qing emerged from a state on the periphery of a major contemporary political order ... these empires all demonstrated a fluid approach to identity, loyalty, and inclusion in their early and most dynamic periods of conquest ... the Qing empire had to manipulate rhetorics of loyalty and history in order to create an atmosphere in which it accepted all new subjects and collaborators (Pp. 107–108).

The chapter on the Russian Empire covers almost five centuries of history, and Bushkovitch does an excellent job of discussing how the meaning of empire changed in Russia over the centuries. Moscow was the epicenter of the emerging

Russian Empire. After it defeated Tver and Novgorod, Moscow fended off both the Tatar khanates and the more powerful rival in the West – the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. It did not develop an imperial ideology, instead the Muscovite princes claimed they were the legal inheritors of the Kievan Rus and descendants of the legendary Rurik the Viking. As Bushkovitch notes, “their ideology was dynastic, not imperial” (P. 115). By the end of the sixteenth century, the rulers of Moscow had conquered three (the Kazan, the Astrakhan, and the Siberian) out of the four Tatar khanates. They allied with the Crimean Tatars against Poland, but this alliance ended after the Tatars started raiding Muscovite territories. Starting with the fifteenth century, Muscovite state legitimacy was often described in religious terms, as the defender of Christian Orthodoxy against a perceived Muslim threat. Until the end of the seventeenth century, “the Russian elites saw themselves as the New Israel and Moscow as the new Jerusalem” (P. 117). Cossacks soon emerged as Russia’s devoted warriors defending Russian possessions against the Tatar raids, exploring the eastern frontier, and reaching the Pacific Ocean by the 1640s (P. 116). Muscovite rulers were termed princes until Ivan IV was crowned tsar in 1547, adopting a regal term with origins both in the Byzantine

Empire, and Orthodox traditions of sacral kingship. The New Israel moved in a secular direction with Peter the Great, who Westernized the empire. After Sweden’s defeat in 1721, the Russian Senate gave Peter the title of “emperor” and by 1917, the official title included the term “imperator vserossiiskii,” a noteworthy combination of Latin and Russian terminology, which indicates that the Russian rulers were emulating the Western empires.

Bushkovitch reflects on the changing priorities of Russian foreign policy as it expanded and stopped at the borders of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires. The ultimate stage of Russia’s expansion was the European imperialist stage in the East (Central Asia and Manchuria). One striking feature about the Russian Empire is how it managed to co-opt numerous Germans, Ukrainians, Poles, and Georgians into the ranks of its nobility. The elite at the emperor’s court was neither wholly Orthodox nor Russian, even though claims to protect Orthodoxy and the Russian nationality were central to Moscow’s claims on state legitimacy. Indeed, Islam was a tolerated religion throughout Russia’s imperial history. As the author writes, Russia was a land-based agrarian Eurasian empire that was in fact composed of two empires “one in the south and east, and the other in the west” (P. 137).

The master case, the United States, is discussed by Frank Ninkovich and deserves more attention. Compared to the other cases, the American case covers rather a short period of time, only one century. Ninkovich considers that the economic theories of imperialism and of informal empire do a poor job of explaining American foreign policy since 1898. The U.S. annexation of the Philippines was its *imperial moment*. The current debate on the American imperialism is a rather pale reflection of discussions on the same topic during the electoral campaign of 1900; ironically, at that time Democrats were in favor of imperialism, while liberal Republicans, and Bryan’s Democrats – against it. The issue of contention was whether the new territories should be allowed to join the Union as new federal states or should be allowed in just as colonial possessions. While the British example was influential in the United States at that time, the imperialists’ key argument was that “it would make the United States an equal participant as a great power in the grand task of civilization” (P. 147). The Americans were not concerned with their security. Instead, they were worried that European powers might parcel South America as they had with Africa. The occupation of the Philippines in 1898 was by no means overwhelmingly popular, and a host of other

policy options were debated, but ultimately occupation was regarded as the least-worst option. Ninkovich writes, “in 1898 and 1899, then, one sees commingled a variety of elements – accident and opportunity, debate and an engaged public opinion, a deliberate choice made from providential opportunity rather than out of necessity, an absence of fear (real or imagined), and a desire to be recognized as an equal by European peers – all of which would be absent in the early twenty-first century” (P. 150). Only after twenty years would anti-imperialist sentiments come to dominate and by the 1940s imperialism was widely considered to be expensive, unproductive, unnecessary, and morally unjustifiable. Therefore, as Ninkovich mentions “the current popularity of imperialism as a theme of discussion in the United States suggests either a deep ignorance of the anti-imperialist side of the story or a willful desire to ignore it” (P. 155).

Ninkovich is reluctant to accept the idea of an American empire and contends that “empire in this instance is being used metaphorically” (P. 163). There are three possible explanations for the academic and popular use of the empire metaphor with regard to the United States: (a) empire is rooted in American history, (b) empire is an unintended consequence of earlier political decisions and the refusal to face

the facts suggests that the United States might be an empire in denial, and (c) this is a discontinuous and different situation, and for lack of a better term, scholars use obsolete imperialist rhetoric. Hence “the ambiguities surrounding the use of the word, and the inability to provide clarification, suggest that Americans find themselves in a historically novel situation, largely of their own making, which they do not fully understand” (P. 166), and the author’s cautious advice: “empire, if one insists on applying the term to the contemporary situation, exists within an international environment whose scale and characteristics are new to history” (P. 166). Ninkovich clearly favors the third explanation and devotes space to showing that a system, where there is no kowtowing, no tribute, and no territorial expansion does not resemble the old-style empires. Rather, says the author: “If, metaphorically speaking, this new global order is indeed the new empire, it is an empire without an emperor, an empire in which the United States is at best an embattled general manager” (P. 168).

In the book’s conclusion, Kagan summarizes that this comparative study of imperial moments proposes at least six findings. Not all of them were present in each case, but it is the task of further comparative studies to confirm the validity of these findings. First, few policymakers

were aware that their state was on the brink of empire. Second, generations are needed for a transition from a powerful state to an empire. Third, definitions of empire should include two elements, “self-identification and the permanent subordination of one or more formerly autonomous states” (p. 173). Fourth, the imperial moment was the result not only of the actions of the dominant state but also of the peripheral elites testing the limits of the powerful state. However, as Kagan states, “leaders of powerful states choose whether their states become empires” (P. 186). Fifth, outsiders start naming a powerful state an empire before the elite of that state identifies it as such. Finally and most important, there is a complex relationship between power preponderance, imperial discourses, and primacy in the international system. The three moments are not simultaneous and do not necessarily coincide.

Even though the aim of the volume is not to “offer a general description of the process by which all states become empires or a general theory to explain that process” (P. 7), some aspects related to the overall theoretical framework adopted by the contributors deserve further improvement. First, the case selection criteria could have been specified more precisely. Conceptually, it is not entirely clear what exactly constitutes a case. Are these cases

the Russian/British/Roman empires throughout centuries or is it only the imperial moment of the given empire? In other words, it would have been useful to define the imperial moment in such a way that scholars could easily identify it and compare the underlying conditions (a table might have helped here). Selecting cases based on a clear definition of the imperial moment and covering the short period before and after the imperial moment might lend more theoretical force to the argument and might help other academics include additional cases.

Second, the volume undoubtedly contributes to the literature on empires by focusing on the *emergent empires* and by paying close attention to the conditions of transition from a powerful state to an empire. But not all powerful states become empires and the question is why? Looking at the negative cases – in other words, at the cases where this linear transition failed – might have provided more insights regarding this process.

Third, the contributors do not always adhere to the tasks and definitions specified in the introduction to the volume, but given the diversity of the historical periods that they are dealing with this should not strike one as surprising. Although there are references to the comparative history of empires, each of the contributors is focusing on his case, so the comparative aspect of the study

is present mainly in the conclusion of the volume.

Fourth, given that the imperial moment represents a pattern of interactions between the states involved, it seems hard to identify it. How do I know it when I see it? There might be many annexations in the history of a powerful state or hegemon, and there are cases where imperial discourses emerge and survive in the absence of an empire. So how do we know which one is the imperial moment? Related to that is another question. Are there cases of reversals of imperial transitions, cases where an empire undergoes a transition back to being a powerful state? We might call those anti-imperial/unimperial moments. Finally, should we not perhaps talk about an *imperial momentum* rather than about an imperial moment? The questions above were provoked by this insightful volume, hence I consider that this compelling account accomplishes its mission. Namely, it forces scholars to reflect again on the emergence of empires, and to rethink the use of the imperial analogy with regard to the United States. American policymakers might want to look at some of the policy implications formulated in the conclusion. Overall, this is a must-read for scholars doing research on the comparative rise of empires, and it should be included as an important source in any bibliography on imperialism.