PART I

Introduction

CHAPTER I

Ordering knowledge

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IMPERIAL KNOWLEDGE

This volume seeks to explore the ways in which particular conceptions of knowledge and particular ways of textualising knowledge were entwined with social and political practices and ideals within the Roman Imperial period. In the process, we explore the possibility that the Roman Empire brought with it distinctive forms of knowledge, and, in particular, distinctive ways of ordering knowledge in textual form.

The chapters following this one contain a series of case studies, examining the politics and poetics of knowledge-ordering within a wide range of texts, testing out each of them carefully for signs of their engagement with other works of similar type, and with the world around them. Our principal interest is in texts that follow a broadly 'compilatory' aesthetic, accumulating information in often enormous bulk, in ways that may look unwieldy or purely functional to modern eyes, but which in the ancient world clearly had a much higher prestige than modern criticism has allowed them. The prevalence of this mode of composition in the Roman world is astonishing, as will become clear in the course of this discussion. It is sometimes hard to avoid the impression that accumulation of knowledge is the driving force for all of Imperial prose literature. That obsession also makes its mark on verse, for example within the scrolls of didactic epic or in the anthologisation of epigrams. In this volume, we range across miscellanistic, encyclopedic, biographical, novelistic, philosophical, scientific, technical, didactic and historical works (insofar as these generic distinctions can be maintained), in Greek and Latin.[1] Inevitably we cover only a tiny fraction of the texts such a project might engage with, picking especially works

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[1] Many of these areas have been largely neglected in recent scholarship, especially by scholars working in the area of cultural history, although in some cases that has begun to change. To take just one example, the field of ancient technical writing has seen a recent expansion of interest; relevant works not discussed further below include the following: Fögen (ed.) (2005), Horster and Reitz (eds.) (2003), Santini, Mastrorosa and Zumbo (eds.) (2002), Formisano (2001), Long (2001), Meissner

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which seem to us to have paradigmatic status for habits of compilation in this period – although we have tried to convey something of the enormous (if inevitably unquantifiable) scale of this compilatory industry in our footnoted lists of known authors and works within a range of genres.

The essays in Part 2, following this introduction, are focused especially on the way in which authors order their own texts and the writings of others. All of these chapters start by teasing out some of the ordering, structuring principles and patterns of the texts they examine, and move from there to discuss the cultural and political resonances of those patterns, and the ways in which they contribute to authorial self-positioning. The essays in Part 3 in addition address more head-on the question of how compilatory texts impose order on the extra-textual world. These chapters are generally more interested, in other words, in the way in which texts deal with practical challenges, and the way in which they take on images and ideals from the world around them – especially the world of empire – reshaping them and using them as structuring reference-points for their own projects. Needless to say, there can be no firm dividing line between those two approaches.

However, the broad question of the 'Imperialness' or otherwise of these knowledge-ordering strategies – which is a central preoccupation of many (though not all) of the chapters which follow – cannot simply be left to emerge from these individual readings. This introduction attempts a preliminary answer to that question.

The idea of an interrelation between knowledge and empire in the modern world is not new.[2] Edward Said has shown how imperial ideologies shaped and were shaped by the rhetoric of modern European ethnography, and how they seeped into many other areas of discourse.[3] There are countless studies, many of them drawing on Said's work, which show how European scientific knowledge, and the knowledge of colonised cultures within European empires, developed step by step with the institutions and assumptions of empire.[4] Those enquiries have illuminated, amongst other things, the role of science as a tool of empire; the influence of European science on conquered populations; the ways in which local knowledge

(1999), Nicolet (ed.) (1995). All of those volumes share the aim of comparing and juxtaposing a range of different technical authors; many of them bring out vividly the way in which these at-first-sight purely functional texts manipulate shared tropes of structuration and authorial self-representation, often with a high degree of ingenuity (e.g., see Formisano (2001), esp. 27–31, on recurrent use of the rhetoric of *utilitas, sollertia, diligentia* and *dissimulatio* in late-antique technical writing).

[2] See Flemming (2003) for an attempt to relate work on modern empires to Hellenistic knowledge.
[3] Said (1978) and (1993).
[4] See, amongst many others, Stafford (1989), Macleod (1993), Bayly (1996), Miller and Reill (eds.) (1996), Washbrook (1999), Drayton (2000).

influenced metropolitan scientific practice; the ways in which increased knowledge of the globe opened up new areas for scientific study; and the ways in which ideals of scientific progress and ambition were intertwined with metropolitan justifications of imperial domination.

Moreover, modern practices of scientific writing have been significantly shaped by ancient models of objective and exhaustive compilation of knowledge within textual form – although this volume for the most part leaves to one side the question of the reception of ancient knowledge-ordering in the post-classical world.[5] The structures of post-classical knowledge-ordering – in the Arabic, medieval and Renaissance worlds and beyond – are indebted to ancient models.[6] Modern encyclopedism follows the encyclopedic projects of Pliny and others, despite the great differences between modern and ancient conceptions of what an 'encyclopedia' comprises.[7]

One might therefore expect to see similar links between knowledge-ordering texts and imperial ambitions in both the ancient and modern worlds. And yet when we read the knowledge-bearing texts of the Roman Empire, it is often difficult – more difficult than for much of the scientific writing of the British Empire, for example – to ground their relation with the imperial project in detailed analysis. Some ancient authors shun the impression of being implicated in the realities of imperial power. Many avoid the appearance of radical innovation, advertising instead their close relationship with the accumulated knowledge of the past. That difficulty can be partly explained by the tendency for imperialist rhetoric to conceal itself beneath the mask of objectivity or aesthetic elevation (as Said and others have shown). This point is crucial for ancient and modern empires alike. But that explanation is not on its own enough. We also need to acknowledge that the Roman Empire poses its own very particular problems of analysis – that the mutually parasitic relationship between ancient empire and knowledge arose from rhetorical traditions and institutional structures very different from anything familiar in the experience of modern European empires. Most obviously, the cultural impositions and interventionist strategies of administration that have characterised many

[5] Equally we leave to one side any attempt at comparative approaches of the kind Geoffrey Lloyd has pioneered in juxtaposing Chinese science, and its context of empire, with Greek science and society: see esp. Lloyd (1996).

[6] See, e.g., Koerner (1999) on the influence of ancient knowledge-ordering texts on Linnaeus.

[7] See Collison (1964); McArthur (1986), esp. 38–56, who traces the development of compilatory writing from Aristotle and Pliny, through Christian compilers like Cassiodorus and Isidore of Seville, to the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas and beyond; Arnar (1990); Yeo (2001) 5–12 on the descent of modern encyclopedism from ancient precedents, and *passim* on development of conceptions of encyclopedism in eighteenth-century Europe; also Murphy (2004) 11–12.

of those empires find almost their inverse in the relatively light touch, in cultural terms, of Roman rule. What we need, then, is a set of questions sensitive to that specificity. That is the task of this introduction.

knowledge and power

The links between knowledge and power more generally – putting aside for now the specific context of empire – have of course been much theorised. For Michel Foucault, most influentially, power is not simply a commodity, possessed by governments and influential individuals and exercised by them from above. Rather it is a complex network of relationships constantly being acted out and reshaped within even the smallest encounters of everyday life. Moreover, knowledge and its 'will to truth' are central to Foucauldian power. Epistemology cannot be divorced from particular social relations and situations. It is not some abstract activity, practised from a position of detachment; rather it is enacted within all institutions of social encounter. Each society, Foucault argues, has its own conditions for truth:

> that is, the type of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining the truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.[8]

Those who have access to the knowledge that holds a social and political system together necessarily control the distribution of power within that system. And yet truth is never stable and monolithic. Rather it is something open to debate and renegotiation, shaped and enacted through and within the workings of power. The systems of thought identifying individuals with certain roles do so not bluntly and coercively, but rather with the collusion of those individuals – through the creation of desire for particular subject positions. Negotiation of truth and power are thus ingrained in the textures of everyday life. When people act out particular roles, as parents and children, teachers and students, doctors and patients, they are constantly negotiating 'questions of power, authority, and the control of definitions of reality'.[9] Knowledge-bearing institutions and bodies of thought – medicine, hospitals, prisons, asylums – are embedded in and founded upon these relationships of power; and knowledge-bearing texts, often the texts that

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[8] Quotation from an interview with Foucault published in Gordon (1980) 131.
[9] Dirks, Eley and Ortner (1994) 4, part of a good brief discussion, setting Foucault's work in the context of wider developments in anthropology, history and the social sciences; see also McNay (1994) 48–132.

provide theoretical backing for those institutions, are profoundly marked by them, able to reveal beneath their dispassionate surfaces something of what it is possible to say or to think within the societies and disciplines from which they arise.

The broad relevance of those points will be clear. The world of knowledge – comprising both the institutions defining it and the texts embodying it – is never neutral, detached, objective. The assumption that the textual compilation of knowledge is a practice distinct from political power will not stand. All of the texts examined in this volume are embedded both within the overarching hierarchies and patterns of thought of Roman-empire society and within the power relations and power struggles of specific intellectual disciplines (more on that below)[10] – although here again we should acknowledge how far our own experiences differ from those of the ancient world, where official institutionalisation of knowledge production was in general more localised and circumscribed. Similar conclusions – both inspired by Foucault's work and developed in parallel to it – have increasingly preoccupied a whole range of modern academic disciplines. Feminist scholarship has revealed the gendered assumptions deeply rooted within centuries of male-produced and male-centred discourse.[11] Anthropology has shown how the structuring hierarchies and thought patterns of a society may be ingrained even – or perhaps especially – within its most frivolous and abstract habits of cultural activity.[12]

Foucault's challenging work is not without its difficulties, of course – in fact Foucault himself constantly struggled to revise and update his models during the course of his career.[13] Most importantly for this volume, Foucault's model of the functioning of power and knowledge on some readings leaves little or no room for the agency of individuals. Foucault's insistence that resistance to power is always bound up in and reproductive of the systems it challenges has been thought to have pessimistic implications for the possibility of resistance to social injustice.[14] Many of the essays in this volume address that problem, particularly through questioning the degree to which encyclopedic styles of composition allow and provoke varied reader response to the patterns of thought they showcase. How far, in other words, does knowledge imply subjection to historically determined forces? How do individuals carve out their own spaces within the overarching structures

[10] Pp. 24–7; cf. Barton (1994b) on the scientific writing of the Roman Empire.
[11] See, e.g., Dirks, Eley and Ortner (1994) 32–6.   [12] E.g., see Geertz (1973).
[13] See McNay (1994) 66–9 on Foucault's attempts in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) to nuance his rather monolithic concept of the 'episteme' in *The Order of Things* (1970).
[14] See McNay (1994) 100–102.

which they are formed by? And what role does textual presentation of knowledge play within those processes?

Examination of the Roman Empire as a specific context for knowledge production also has relevance for Foucault's conceptions of chronological change. Does Foucault's model of 'epistemic shifts' between different periods with different systems of logic[15] offer insight into the post-Augustan world, where the rhetoric of a 'new start' was paraded so widely? Or does that model play into the hands of a naïve historicism, resting on simplistic modern periodisations of the ancient world? Should we be looking instead for a model that accounts for change in conceptions of knowledge as a gradual and painstaking evolution impelled by the pressures and innovations of competitive elite self-assertion?

hellenistic/republican knowledge

One way of assessing the cultural and historical specificity of knowledge-systems of the Roman Empire is to view its relation with what had come before it. Certainly, they did not emerge *e nihilo*. Aristotle's project of systematising knowledge across an enormous range of different subjects lies behind all of the texts we discuss in later chapters. Equally influential was the culture of Hellenistic Alexandria, which both inherited and developed Aristotelian scholarly practice. Here we see uniquely concrete links between the projects of political organisation and cultural systematisation. The Alexandrian library (later imitated in Pergamum and elsewhere) brought the whole world into a single city, broadcasting the glory of the Ptolemaic rule that had provided the conditions for its possibility. And a whole range of scholars imitated and influenced that totalising gesture in their individual works, covering a range of subjects inconceivable within the hyper-specialised world of modern academic writing: Zenodotus, for example, Homeric editor and lexicographer and first head of the Library; Callimachus, whose poetry flaunts its own dazzling generic flexibility, in combination with designedly abstruse bibliographical and historical knowledge; and most prodigiously of all, Eratosthenes, whose work covers mathematical, chronographical, geographical, philosophical and literary scholarship.[16] Others outside Alexandria followed similar paths: Theophrastus, the successor of Aristotle in the Athenian Lyceum; Aratus, the poet-scholar based

[15] See McNay (1994) 64–6.
[16] See Pfeiffer (1968), and now Erskine (ed.) (2003) (especially the chapters by Hunter (2003) and Flemming (2003)); for Eratosthenes, see the rich account of Geus (2002).

in Pergamum; and Posidonius, the extraordinary polymath of the second to first centuries BCE, who prospered in Rome. Many Imperial Greek writers depended heavily on their Hellenistic predecessors for both form and content. Similarly, their Latin counterparts often drew heavily from Hellenistic Greek work, while also following the agendas laid out by great Republican systematisers like Cicero and especially Varro, whose work covered history, grammar, geography, agriculture, law, philosophy, medicine and other fields.[17]

On that evidence, modern scholars of ancient science have sometimes concluded that Imperial compilers of knowledge were merely derivative.[18] That approach, however, drastically underestimates the potential for innovativeness in compilatory styles of composition, as well as failing to examine the key questions of synchronic cultural analysis which this volume addresses.

For one thing, it mistakes the rhetoric of conservatism often paraded by ancient scientific discourse for the real thing. The importance of rhetorical self-promotion within ancient science and medicine encouraged a degree of originality; but also paradoxically suppressed excessive inventiveness, as speakers and writers went out of their way to avoid the impression of showy innovation.[19] It also ignores the opportunities for inventive reshaping embedded within the techniques of editing and compiling – inventiveness which several of the following chapters explore. And it fails to consider the ways in which even texts following broadly Hellenistic or Republican structures or styles of composition so often bring out the tension between older and newer configurations of knowledge. That is clear, for example, in works where the concept of geographical scope is an important structuring principle.[20] Strabo's geographical history,[21] for instance, or Pausanias' *Periegesis*,[22] work with fundamentally Hellenistic conceptions of space, but are also acutely aware of the way in which Roman rule has reconfigured the geography of the Greek east. Pliny's *Natural history* draws into itself the accumulated erudition of the Greek and Roman past, but in doing so it

[17] On the late-Republican intellectual scene see esp. Rawson (1985).
[18] On modern scholarship's deprecation of Imperial literature on the grounds of derivativeness, see Whitmarsh (2001) 41–5.
[19] See Lloyd (1996) 74–92 (esp. 90–92) on medical writers. On the ambiguities of innovation in rhetorical theory, see Whitmarsh (2005a) 54–6.
[20] For the general point, see Momigliano (1974) 27–49.   [21] See Clarke (1999), esp. 193–244.
[22] See Cohen (2001) for the argument that Pausanias' worldview is more 'Hellenistic' than, for example, Strabo's, less comfortably integrated with Roman imperial geography; see, however, Elsner (1992) and (1994), and (from a different perspective) Arafat (1996) for Pausanias' engagement with the realities of the Roman present.

repeatedly invites us to compare this accumulation with patterns of Roman topographical dominance.[23]

A number of scholars have also suggested causal links between the political and cultural conditions which framed the transition from Republic to Empire and the emergence of distinctive knowledge-ordering genres. Claudia Moatti has argued that the drive to assemble disparate strands of knowledge was a response to the fragmentation of late-Republican society and political culture.[24] Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has linked the move towards specialised knowledge under Augustus with shifting ideas of political authority.[25] Trevor Murphy has pointed out that the 'encyclopedia' is a Roman invention, but also a product of the Roman encounter with Greek ideals of all-embracing education (*enkyklios paideia*) – the alienness of this concept for Romans drove them to attempt a fixed, textual version of it, as opposed to the more fluid version which was enshrined within centuries of Greek educational tradition – and dependent on the territorial and intellectual ambitions of a unified empire. In the process he shows how Pliny's encyclopedic project in particular is adapted for the context of the Roman Empire, drawing, for example, on the rhetoric of imperial conquest and the emperor's authority (more on that below).[26]

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

One of the most distinctive features of Roman Imperial conceptions of geographical space was its insistence on the co-existence of overarching identities with local ones, in line with both the inclusive ideology of Roman rule and Panhellenic visions of the world, where civic individuality is compatible with, even necessary for, the perpetuation of shared Greek identity. How far can we see those tensions reflected in Imperial textualisations of knowledge? And how far should we distinguish between different contexts for local knowledge within the melting-pot of Roman culture?

There are some signs of regional clusters of specialisms. For example, Athens, Alexandria, Tarsus, Aegae and Pergamum were all thriving centres of rhetorical and philosophical education.[27] And yet those concentrations

[23] See French (1994) 207–18; Murphy (2003) and (2004); Carey (2003), esp. 32–40.
[24] Moatti (1988), (1991) and (1997). [25] See Wallace-Hadrill (1997), discussed further below, p. 21.
[26] See pp. 20–2, and Murphy (2004), esp. 13–14 and 194–6 on the origins of Roman encyclopedism; cf. McEwen (2003) on the way in which Vitruvius' project links itself with its political context by appropriating the metaphor of the empire as a unified body in order to apply that to the discipline of architecture.
[27] See Natali (2000) 210.

leave very few textual traces. Roman Empire writing tends to emphasise (variably conceived) intellectual cosmopolitanism ahead of provincial specificity[28]. There are some exceptions, where an insistence on cosmopolitanism leads paradoxically to a strong sense of place, focused on iconic cultural centres like Rome and Athens. Galen, who is reticent about his medical training in Pergamum but conjures up a vivid portrait of the medical and philosophical scene in Rome,[29] is a case in point – although even he is often vague about the precise setting of the medical debates he describes, conjuring up an imagined, utopian landscape of shared intellectual endeavour, which also stretches back over the centuries, allowing him to enter into dialogue with his medical predecessors. Aulus Gellius, similarly, implies a cosmopolitan but specifically Athenian setting for the miscellaneous collection of conversations and reminiscences in his *Attic nights*. Plutarch does much the same with Delphi in his *Delphic dialogues*. But Athens and Delphi and Rome were unusual cases.

Where Imperial writers do grant specific forms of local knowledge to provincial contexts, it is usually to tease them for their failure to match normal Panhellenic standards, as in Dio Chrysostom's comical portrait of the cultural backwaters of Borysthenes and Euboea (although for the Cynic moralist, such places also offer positive lessons for his Prusan audience).[30] There is evidence for the continuing importance of local history, but with the near-total loss of this genre, and few signs of its lateral impact on other literature, it is hard to press any strong claims on its behalf.[31]

That relative invisibility of local context does at least have some resonance with the increasing emphasis within anthropology and modern history on the importance of seeing 'local knowledges' not as self-contained and inward-looking ways of seeing the world, but rather as bodies of thought which engage with and contribute to universal knowledge.[32] But it may well make us uncomfortable even so, trained as we are to insist on the potentially disruptive power of local, marginal voices within the homogenising textures

[28] See pp. 18–20 below.   [29] See Nutton (1972).   [30] Trapp (1995).
[31] See Bowie (1974) 184–8. Others local historians dated by Jacoby to the Imperial period might be added to Bowie's list: e.g., Lyceas of Argos, ὁ τῶν ἐπιχωρίων ἐξηγητής (Paus. 1.13.8 = *FGrH* 312); Posidonius of Olbia, author of *Attic histories* (*FGrH* 335 = 279 T1); Glaucippus, author of a tract on the religion of Athens (*FGrH* 363); Telephanes, author of *On the city* (*FGrH* 371); Menelaus of Aegae, author of a work on Boeotia (*FGrH* 384); Callippus of Corinth, author of a history of Orchomenoi (*FGrH* 384); Timagenes or Timogenes of Miletus, author of *On Heracleia in Pontus* (*FGrH* 435); Theseus, author of *Corinthian matters* (*FGrH* 453); Crito, author of *Sicilian matters*, *Foundations of Syracuse* and a *Tour of Syracuse* (*FGrH* 277 T1); Phlegon of Tralles, author of a description of Sicily (*FGrH* 257 T1).
[32] See, e.g., Moore (1996).