

PART IV

IMPERIAL IDEOLOGIES

Susan E. Alcock and Kathleen D. Morrison

If “empire” is a difficult enough word to define in such a way as to achieve broad consensus, “ideology” is even harder. In our original position paper for the Wenner-Gren conference, the term was taken “to encompass the broad overlapping spheres of religious belief and ritual, of power negotiations and relations, of self-definition and self-representation, or human understanding of ‘world order.’” While an admittedly rather ample embrace of potential meanings, such an open-ended definition suits the variety of approaches and treatments which appear in this volume. Imperial ideologies are here considered in a number of lights and along a number of axes: ruler cult (see papers by Kuhrt, Morkot); the manipulation of provincial memories (Alcock, Yates); highlighting symbolic distinctions between centers and peripheries (Brumfiel, Liverani, MacCormack); articulating difference and facilitating relationships between two imperial systems (Barfield); and the creation of new imperial cultures (Woolf).

What this broad range of approaches and our broad definition would suggest, then, is that “ideology” cannot be taken simply as a more fashionable term for what used to be glossed as “ideas.” Ideologies certainly engage ideas about the world, but, critically, articulate with political and social action and organization. Much previous scholarship had tended to treat the ideological realm as epiphenomenal to the “real” facts behind processes of empire-building and social domination – the *post hoc* justification, the frosting on the cake. Also following such a broadly historical materialist vein is the notion of ideology as necessarily “false,” a perspective which follows directly from its position as a secondary or

derived phenomenon. In this tradition, the complex interplay between thought, belief, and action is ignored or minimized, making ideology seem to be, quite literally, an afterthought to what are presumed to be more fundamental material factors. What we suggest, however, and what many of the contributors to this volume stress, is that there can be no simple divide between mental and material, and that the notion of ideology encompasses a tangled skein of connections that tie together beliefs and belief systems, rituals, representations, forms of organization and association, and even possibilities for action. To label ideologies, then, as "false" or "true" is willfully to overlook their complexity. Alterations (or resistance to alteration) in people's beliefs, symbols, rituals, memories, or cosmologies are taken as essential in understanding the impetus to conquest, the attitudes that could support or deter military and ideological expansion, and the control and restructuring of imperial society; both central polity and annexed territories are here involved.

Despite their diversity, certain attitudes do bind together the majority of contributions in this section. Above all, awareness of the centrality of ideology and ideological transformations to imperial dynamics is everywhere apparent. This increasing recognition and stress on such factors in the study of empire is a significant development, and one in keeping with broader trends in the disciplines of archaeology, anthropology and history in the later twentieth century. Yet a balance is maintained here; none of the chapters in the volume, for example, follows the controversial model of Conrad and Demarest (1984), in which a defined set of ideological motivations is identified as *the* primary force driving the growth of empire. Indeed, Brumfiel takes on one of their principal examples – the Aztec – and, by expanding the contexts in which to examine Aztec ideologies, reveals just how partial such views can be. While an overtly war-like Aztec religion has dominated the scholarly imagination, Brumfiel unpacks other manifestations of symbolic and ritual behavior among non-elite peoples and non-central places, ideological structures very different from what has been assumed as the violent norm. Canonical Aztec militarism emerges as but one active ideological phenomenon, targeting the youthful male elite, while other more local concerns – fertility, commonality – engaged and influenced other Aztec hearts and minds. This by no means implies that the ideology of blood was "imperial" and other versions were not. Rather, Brumfiel makes the case for conceiving of multiple contemporary strands of religious thinking and feeling, all engendered and fostered within the imperial framework and leading to the production of social difference across that framework. The existence of such plural ideological responses and strategies is crucial to the arguments of several other chapters as well (e.g., Alcock, Moreland, Morrison).

Brumfiel's invocation of "hearts and minds" raises the possibility of reflecting on the personal impact of empire, on the degree to which imperial activity could make a significant impression not only on the more material aspects of how people lived their lives, but on how they perceived their lives and their place in the cosmos. Most fundamental to this, perhaps, is the issue of memory. Alcock's

chapter discusses a reconfiguration of social memory, a reformulation and representation of what the Greeks of the eastern Roman empire chose (or could afford) to preserve of their past. She particularly stresses the untapped potential of archaeology in recovering something of the spectrum of memories and counter-memories that would have existed inside an extensive and plural empire. As Woolf notes more generally for the Roman empire, the construction of a powerful notion of citizenship, of a (ruling) Roman people, was part of a critical Roman “myth” that facilitated the operation and expansion of the Roman *imperium*, a myth that, while based on shared imagination, was far from being frivolous, passive, or – one might add – superstructural.

In his chapter, Yates explores how the Qin overrode and overwrote preexisting moralities, boundaries and memories to create a new, “Chinese” people. The specificity and precision of Qin intrusions – revising and naturalizing acceptable conceptions of the body, of time, of the cosmos – may be the sharpest example of the depths to which empire could reach, but several chapters mention similar steps, such as the revision of calendars and ritual schedules, new modes of dress or self-presentation, innovative educational systems, or reorganized patterns of dwelling in the landscape (see Alcock, Deagan, MacCormack, Woolf). While the degree and nature of such ideological intervention would obviously vary from empire to empire, the burden of proof today would lie with those who might claim that imperial annexation would make little difference in the everyday hearts and minds of the conquered.

Another customary way to conceive of imperial ideologies has been as a kind of “imperial glue,” as a cohesive force employed in tandem with the ever-present threat of military coercion. Such a role is certainly acknowledged here, in the supremacy of the Achaemenid ruler who fought the Lie for all his people (Kuhrt), in the spread of Christianity (Deagan), in the incorporation of local deities into orthodox Hindu pantheons (Morrison), in the imperial cults of Nubia (Morkot) or Rome (Woolf) or Peru (MacCormack). But the possibility of rejection or subversion of such umbrella-like ideologies is also conceded. Strategies of resistance in its various forms – both violent and passive – are explored, if rarely explicitly foregrounded, in several chapters (see discussions in Alcock, Brumfiel, Deagan, Morrison, Yates). Rome’s self-declared position *vis-à-vis* natural and cosmological “constants,” Woolf argues, generated a commandingly pervasive imperial vision of “empire as cosmic domination”; yet even here a counterpoint narrative of subversion and destabilization is evident, springing up from and inverting these same Roman myths of unity and supremacy.

Although this volume engages with the subject of imperial ideologies in myriad specific ways, its essential lesson is relatively straightforward. It asserts the immense potential for ideological manipulations and transformations, be they blatantly relentless or elegantly subtle, across the territorial and social expanses of empire. Indeed, one might argue (as some conference participants did) that empires *always* build on some form of ideological transformation involving, minimally, constructions of sovereignty or rule. Chapters in this volume unveil

a range of reconfigurations in the ideological sphere, while also offering various models of how to access and measure such change. All manner of sources (textual, art historical, ethnohistoric, and, of course, archaeological) are here deployed and, in the best cases, combined – as they must be, if we are even to begin to recover imperial ideologies in their boundless complexity.