The volume complements VERÓNICA MARTÍNEZ FERRERAS’ earlier analysis of the fabric of wine amphorae produced in the region³ by applying the results of this research to broader fundamental questions concerning the scale and organization of production, the validity of the villa model, the role of harbours and infrastructure, and regional variations in the distribution of amphorae. The papers – as one might expect from a cast of distinguished Spanish and French archaeologists – are of a high quality and several are provocative in advocating new avenues of research and methodologies, and in overturning previous conceptions. Whilst elements of the papers can be found published elsewhere, this book makes the most up to date Spanish and French research accessible to a wider audience. Although disparate in focus, the papers are complementary and will become required reading for any interested in the development of viticulture in the Late Republic and Early Empire.

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Published as one of the supplements to the journal Ancient West & East and strictly focused on cultural-historical phenomena occurring at and received through intermediaries from the periphery of the ancient world, this collection of papers – in the words of the series editor, GOCHA TSETSKHLADZE – is very well suited to the series’ specific range of interests and aims (p. VII). The volume is divided into eleven chapters preceded by a Series Editor’s Introduction, a Preface by the volume editor, as well as a List of Illustrations, and followed by a List of Contributors and an Index. It presents the more recent work of established scholars from across Europe, including Russia, France, Poland and Italy. The papers cover a significant chronological span from the second half of the 2nd millennium BC to medieval elaborations on ancient conceptions of periphery. The effect of embracing all edges of the oikoumene has purposely been sought (p. 2). As a result, the collection can be regarded ‘as the first more-or-less systematic attempt to discuss these problems’ (p. 1).

In a broadly conceptualized Introduction (‘The Periphery of the Classical World as Seen from the Centre: Mastering the Oikoumene’, p. 1–5), PODOSSINOV sets the stage for the multi-faceted methodology employed when dealing with real knowledge or speculative schemes of a cosmological, geographical, ethnographical or religious character. By posing eight research questions, he acknowledges

the pitfalls associated with turning ethnographical data collected in distant regions into desired sources for geographical and historical studies.

In a short etymological study called ‘Sail-Free Via Malea (ὑπὲρ Μαλέαν): The Wind from Kaikos in the Cultural and Military Context of the Eastern Mediterranean of the Second Half of the 2nd Millennium BC’ (p. 7–11), NIKOLAI KAZANSKY draws upon linear B documents, ancient literary accounts and linguistic analogies suggesting that Zephyros may have been derived from the archaic name of the Island of Melos, whereas Kaikias was named after the Anatolian Kaikos River whose mouth is aligned, from the north-east, with another navigation pointer, Cape Malea in Peloponnese. Overall, this article serves as an implicit prelude to the more daring and far-reaching geographical explorations in the post-Mycenaean centuries.

‘Centre et périphérie dans les mappemondes grecques’ (p. 13–29) by FRANCESCO PRONTERA is a profound study juxtaposing the traditional notion of the inhabited world as a circle surrounded by the mythical Ocean with the ancient scientific theory of the sphericity of the Earth. By taking into account all geographical, cartographical and astronomical aspects of the evolution of the two models grounded in the works of dozens of writers from Hecataeus to Geminus, PRONTERA concludes that, although imperfect and distorting the real distances, shape and size of lands and seas, the archaic circular world maps remained in use because they reflected the history of a civilization entirely constructed on ‘domicentric’ principles of space perception.

Being the author of so many seminal works on the history of ancient and medieval cartography, PASCAL ARNAUD here delivers another brilliant analysis by focusing his study on the most frequent issues the mapmakers had faced in the representation of the world’s boundaries. ‘Mapping the Edges of the Earth: Approaches and Cartographical Problems’ (p. 31–57) is an amply illustrated examination of extant maps such as that of Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Cotton, the Jerome and the Peutinger maps, as well as of core literary accounts in Plutarch, Agathemerus, Apuleius, Ptolemy, to name a few. ARNAUD rejects the suggestion that a particular map could be related to a particular culture. To him, lying some way between geometry and painting (p. 32), ancient and medieval cartography did not use a ‘unified image of the inhabited world but as many patterns as there were aims and purposes’ (p. 52). In the map-tablets, the physical limits also prevented the ‘realistic’ representation of what was thought or theorized of eschatia and perata. The ‘worn-out’ edge of the map readily became the space for ‘unintelligible or mistaken legends’, ‘simplification and banalisation’ (p. 57).

Taking the present-day catastrophic shriveling of the Aral Sea as his starting point, IGOR PYANKOV explores once more the intricate problem on ‘The Oxus and the Caspian Sea in the Ancient Geography of the Classical World’ (p. 59–66) in thorough retrospect. Most importantly, his survey is supplemented by recent archaeological discoveries from Turkménistan and geological conclusions on the Sarykamysh delta of the Amu-Darya and the Uzboy as the Amu-Darya’s channel between the 7th century BC and the 4th century AD. In corroboration of his thesis that the Araxus, the Oxus, the Araxša and the Aredvī are ancient names of the
Amu-Darya, Pyankov provides readers with detailed analytical reconstruction of the ancient landscape of the waterfall where once the Uzboy added its waters to the Caspian Sea.

In ‘Figuren eines Erdteils: Das Afrika der Alten’ (p. 67–76), Pietro Janni takes the methodology of analogical reasoning by incorporating the principles of Gestalt-psychology and seeking for a conclusive explanation of the failure of ancient and medieval cartographers to delineate Africa. On the example of the figure-ground correlations between Italy and Adria he arrives at a more nuanced understanding of how the ancients developed two models of perception of the contour of Africa, the one that remained incomplete and was first represented in Herodotus, the other one by Ptolemy that proved to be completely wrong. In either instance, however, ancient mariners, geographers and cartographers gave form to the surrounding gulfs and seas, and did not deliberately search for the silhouette of Africa as a discrete continent.

‘Pomponius Mela’s Chorography and Hellenistic Scientific Geography’ (p. 77–94) explores the sources for Mela’s account of the oikoumene. In the first part of his project Dmitry Shcheglov distinguishes between two models of the inhabited world in Eratosthenes and Ptolemy called by him insular and continental respectively (p. 78). Noting that no scientific geography has survived from the period between Hipparchus and Ptolemy, in the second part, Shcheglov explains a series of oddities in Mela by drawing parallels with two overlooked passages in Plutarch and Pausanias, and suggesting a common source in a lost Greek work built on geographical and cartographical principles similar to those which lie behind Ptolemy’s Geography.

In ‘Die Alexandergründungen in den nordiranischen Ländern im Lichte der geographischen Tradition der Antike’ (p. 95–121) Marek Jan Olbrzycht’s research focuses on the foundations in Parthia, Margiana, Areia, Sakastan and Arachosia. Systematic as it is, this expository survey encompasses the fragmentary discourse in Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy, Ammianus Marcellinus, Isidore of Charax and Stephanus of Byzantium. Although not explicitly linked to geographical and cartographical issues of the periphery, it contributes to the whole by showing the relativity of the concepts of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ in a large-scale colonization program.

In ‘The Northern Black Sea Region in the Geography of Strabo’ (p. 123–32), Lubov Gratsianskaya explores both the possible literary and non-literary sources of Strabo’s narratives about a vast geographical area long deemed to be situated close to the edge of the oikoumene. The author comes up with the convincing thesis that the Mithridatic Wars may have triggered the transformation of the ‘peripheral’ region into a zone of central interest for Rome. All these features of momentary political conjuncture can be found mirrored in Strabo’s accounts that have been borrowed from Theophanes of Mytilene, Artemidorus of Ephesus, Posidonius and Hypsicrates, but also perhaps from family memoirs and lapidary archives.

The paper by the volume editor, Alexander Podossinov, entitled ‘The Indians in Northern Europe? On the Ancient Roman Notion of the Configuration of
Eurasia’ (p. 133–45), deals with one of the most intricate accounts in Roman geography. Pomponius Mela¹ and Pliny the Elder,² who gave credence to Cornelius Nepos, record that in 62 BC, the king of the Boii presented as a gift to the proconsul of Gaul certain Indians who on a trade voyage had been carried off their course by storms to Germany. After having discussed the historiography of the topic, Podossinov wisely distinguishes between real-life occasions, such as the misinterpretation of the Slavonic ethnonym of Vindi (Venedi) or single visits of Eskimos washed to northern Europe by storms, and the true pretext for ‘utilization’ of this story for literary purposes. The detection of a huge gap in the spatial notion of the North representing Scythia as adjacent to India leads Podossinov to the conclusion that, literary, the whole story is an attempt to confirm the mythological and cosmological concept of the earth-encircling Ocean.

Grigory Bondarenko’s ‘Goidelic Hydronyms in Ptolemy’s Geography: Myth behind the Name’ (p. 147–54) is a short linguistic essay aiming at reconstructing fragments from the cultural historical bridge between Continental Celtic and Early Irish world-views before the adoption of Christianity. By taking a comparative approach and drawing upon Ptolemy’s onomastic data, Gaulish epigraphic material, Irish folklore and medieval glossators, Bondarenko highlights the origin of many Goidelic place-names and outlines the process of passing down of imaginary spaces from generation to generation.

While this collection was evidently not intended as a textbook, it is already a valuable addition to the increasingly animated scholarly discourse on the subject. Most importantly, it incorporates material from across the academic community, removing linguistic barriers and conveying otherwise hardly accessible ideas. Differing in length and approach, these papers provide readers with the immediacy of the current research outcomes, the dynamic, shifting and incomplete picture of a frequently overlooked, and hence rarely investigated, subject.

Congratulations to the publisher, both the series and the volume editors, and to all contributors on the thoughtful content and the good-looking design. Projects like this are admirable because they satisfy the desiderata of polycentric research perspectives. Along the way, we might also arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of how spatial perceptions and cross-cultural knowledge transmission brought historical realities to life.

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¹ Mela 3.44–5.
² Plin. nat. 2.170.