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The absence of a professional police force in the city of Rome in classical times is often identified as a major cause of the collapse of the Republic. But this alleged 'structural weakness' was not removed by the Emperor Augustus and his successors, and was in fact shared with other pre-modern states: a specialized police force is a modern invention. In this critical new study of the system of law and order in ancient Rome in both Republican and Imperial periods, Wilfried Nippel identifies the mechanisms of self-regulation which operated as a stabilizing force within Roman society. This case-study of ancient Rome has a comparative dimension and will interest legal historians of other pre-modern societies as well as ancient historians, anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists.

## KEY THEMES IN ANCIENT HISTORY

### Public order in ancient Rome

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# PUBLIC ORDER IN ANCIENT ROME

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## *Preface*

This book is about the maintenance of public order in ancient Rome, with special reference to the period of the Republic. It deals with the methods by which the rules designed to secure peace in the community were enforced. It elucidates the characteristic Roman responses to issues of public order, such as arose in the case of rule-infringements which could not simply be left for settlement (of whatever kind) between the parties concerned or to the decision of a court that one of the parties could call upon, but had to be dealt with through communal means of enforcement.

Scholars who have investigated problems of law and order in the Late Republic have often argued that the lack of a strong and politically impartial police force was a serious, structural weakness in Roman society. It turns out that the Roman Imperial period, with its new governmental agencies, did not remedy the alleged deficiency. Moreover, the same point could be made at the expense of virtually all pre-modern societies. The establishment of a police force in the sense of a specialized and impartial law-enforcement agency was an innovation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was the product of fundamental changes in individual and societal attitudes towards, and demands for, public order. This book rejects the notion that modern standards of policing are 'natural' and indispensable to the proper functioning of a political community, and sets out instead to identify the functional equivalents of a police force in a 'policiless' society.

I should like to thank Peter Garnsey and Paul Cartledge for their encouragement, help and patience. Barbara Metzger carefully and skilfully edited my text and transformed it into intelligible English.

Dannenberg/Elbe, Germany

## *Abbreviations*

- ANRW* *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase. Berlin and New York, 1972–
- CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
- FIRA* *Fontes Juris Romani Anteiustiniani*, ed. S. Riccobono *et al.* 2nd ed. Florence 1940–43
- ILS* H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, 3 vols. Berlin 1892–1916
- ML* R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* Rev. edn. Oxford 1988
- ORF* H. Malcovati, *Oratorum Romanorum Fragmenta*, 2 vols. 4th edn. Turin, 1976–9
- PG* *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne. Paris, 1857–66

Journal titles are abbreviated according to the system of *L'Année philologique*, ancient sources according to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Dates are BC except for those indicated as AD and others which are quite obviously so.