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Andrew Wallace-Hadrill  
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## Rome's Cultural Revolution

The period of Rome's imperial expansion, the late republic and earlier empire, saw transformations of its society, culture and identity. Drawing equally on archaeological and literary evidence, this book offers an original and provocative interpretation of these changes. Moving from recent debates about colonialism and cultural identity, both in the Roman world and more broadly, and challenging the traditional picture of 'romanisation' and 'hellenisation', it offers instead a model of overlapping cultural identities in dialogue with one another. It attributes a central role to cultural change in the process of redefinition of Roman identity, represented politically by the crisis of the republican system and the establishment of the new Augustan order. Romans are shown using Greek culture creatively to create new systems of knowledge which render the old ruling class powerless, and give authority to the new imperial system. The discussion follows a number of principal themes, including the cultural transformations of Italy, the role of Vitruvius' treatise on architecture in building a new Roman identity, the role of antiquarian writers in transforming the idea of Roman tradition, the transformation by Augustus of ways of knowing and controlling the city of Rome and, above all, the growth of luxury, the Roman debate on the issue, and the archaeological evidence for transformations of Roman material culture. Whether or not it is right to see these changes as 'revolutionary', they involve a profound transformation of Roman life and identity, one that lies at the heart of understanding the nature of the Roman empire.

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*To the British School at Rome*

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## Preface

This book is about a transformation of Roman society, culture and identity, in the time span we can characterise (without precision) as the later Republic and earlier Empire. To call it a 'cultural revolution' is to invite debate. The reference to Ronald Syme's ironically-titled *Roman Revolution* is also a reference to the debates that title provoked. The question of whether one can legitimately speak of a political 'revolution' at Rome is semantic: why we choose to hail particular moments as 'revolutions' is a question of our own ideologies and rhetorical agendas.<sup>1</sup> The challenge of the title, however, lies not in deciding what qualifies as a revolution, but what role 'culture' might play. That we are far from the world of Mao's China is evident. 'Culture' is an exceptionally complex concept, and, as I hope to show, has at its heart a tension between competing conceptions of how societies are, or should be, constructed. But beyond all these semantic doubts, the core of my argument is simple enough: that the political transformation of the Roman world is integrally connected to its cultural transformation. The claim is not that cultural change caused political change, nor that it mirrored it; but that the two are so intimately connected that without its cultural components, the political story is two-dimensional.

Nothing in my treatment is intended as definitive. There are many large areas touched on in passing which could have been developed at length: I have tried to focus on a number of themes where I felt I might have a contribution to make. I am fully aware of how much more there is to say about Roman literature, Roman art, and Roman religion. My interest in hellenisation goes back to studying Plautus with Eduard Fraenkel, Horace with Robin Nisbet, and the Second Sophistic with Ewen Bowie. I have watched with admiration while a number of friends, including Mary Beard and Denis Feeney, have changed our approaches to Roman religion. I have witnessed with awe the sea-change to the study of the Mediterranean brought about by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell. If I do not pursue certain themes, it is not for lack appreciation of their interest and importance.

<sup>1</sup> Goldhill and Osborne (2006).

This project has spent painfully long in gestation. The stages of its development often show through the final text, and are in any case marked by a series of publications over the last two decades. The idea of writing a book on this theme grew in the early 1980s in Cambridge while writing about emperors and culture in Suetonius, and wishing my canvas were broader. The title comes from a jesting comment by Brent Shaw on an early outline: I have been unable to get it out of my head. I have been deflected along the way by numerous distractions: the houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum took on a life of their own, the challenges of teaching and of running a department (in Reading) and an institution (in Rome) proved more demanding than my worst fears. For significant steps forward in the project I have always depended on periods of research leave. A semester in the Classics department at Princeton in 1991 gave me the chance to share my ideas with a bright and critical group of graduate students, and to sketch a first draft, long since submerged (to Elaine Fantham I owe not only my invitation, but the chance to read and think in her own peaceful and well-stocked study). A later period in 1994–5 supported by a British Academy Research Readership allowed me to visit Munich and deepen my knowledge of Roman luxury (my understanding of Roman art has been transformed by discussions then and later with Paul Zanker). The text incorporates material from these earlier drafts, and from earlier publications, but as it stands was completely rewritten in subsequent periods of leave from the British School at Rome, first in the Getty Research Centre in Los Angeles (Marion True's kindness to me as to many others is not forgotten), then in the Sackler Library in Oxford (I thank Ewen Bowie for the hospitality of the SCR of Corpus Christi College).

The advantage, and disadvantage, about taking too long over a project is that major publications have continued to appear which change the complexion of the question. In the early stages, Paul Zanker's *Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, Elizabeth Rawson *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic*, and Erich Gruen's *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* reset my agendas. As I tried to finish off the text, major new works continued to appear, including Emma Dench's *Romulus' Asylum* and Denis Feeney's *Caesar's Calendar*. As I have struggled to keep the bibliography in any sense up to date, I have had to concede that the longer I spend updating, the more out of date the text will become.

I have had the benefit and stimulus of the advice of more friends than I can list. Those who have helped me with comments on individual chapters include Michael Fulford, Martin Millett, John Papadopoulos, Simon Keay and Paul Zanker. Many Italian friends have let me pick their brains about their sites, and have proved generous in helping me with illustrations, especially Francesco Cifarelli and Federica Colaiacono for Segni, Sandra

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One final debt is summed up in the dedication. It would not have been possible to write this book as it is without the extraordinary opportunity of living for twelve years in Rome provided to me by the British School. For over a century, this institution has given British (and other) scholars a chance to see the Roman world from a different perspective, to engage with the materiality of Roman Italy, and to get to know different worlds of scholarship, above all that of Italy, but also that of the international cluster of academies in Rome. If this book has a good deal to say about people who find themselves between cultures, it is because I have found myself so. Possibly I place too much weight on language as a model of cultural identity: that is an outcome of living between languages, and being daily confronted with my own limitations and rootedness. I am deeply obliged to the generous help of many colleagues, in particular to Valerie Scott and her staff in the School's superb library, to Sue Russell, for her calm skill in deputising in my absences, to Maria Pia Malvezzi, for arranging permissions for me as for so many others, to Elly Murkett, for keeping administrative distractions at bay, and to four successive Chairmen, Fergus Millar, Geoffrey Rickman, Peter Wiseman and Ivor Roberts, for support in tough times. My final and greatest thanks are to my wife, Jo, who has cheerfully put up with being 'institutionalised' in Rome, and given me unfailing support and encouragement throughout the protracted conception, gestation, and birthpangs of this volume.

AWH  
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### Research institutions

British School at Rome (figs. 3.13, 8.1, 8.15, 8.21, 8.22, 8.33, 8.35, 8.36, 8.37, Plate XXIV); Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Rome (figs. 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 6.9, 6.11, 6.12, 6.13, 6.15); Ecole Française de Rome (figs. 6.1, 6.2, 6.21, 6.22, 6.23, 6.24, 6.25).

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