

## *Introduction*

But suicides have a special language.  
 Like carpenters they want to know which tools.  
 They never ask why build.<sup>1</sup>

Anne Sexton, “Wanting to Die”

How can we understand the local experience of change attendant on empire in the Roman world? Where should we look, and how do we begin to understand the processes involved? For much of the twentieth century, the end result that required explanation seemed self-evident, its manifestations all around in the landscapes (Roman roads, villas with mosaics, Hadrian’s Wall), townscapes (urban grids, baths, theaters, and amphitheaters) and place-names of northern and western Europe (e.g., Aosta = Augusta [Praetoria], Köln/Cologne = Colonia [Claudia Ara Agrippinensium], Zaragoza = Caesaraugusta), its identification with “civilization,” and, in more sophisticated accounts, its “blending” of distinctive regional and international features. Giving it a pseudo-technical name, most often “Romanization” or “Romanitas” (a term that appears in antiquity as a one-off with obscure meaning in Tertullian’s *De Pallio* (4, 1, 1), and that has been hopelessly generalized in modern scholarship), has only strengthened the sense that we are talking about a readily identifiable phenomenon, and that we are all talking about the *same* phenomenon.

The assumption that the end-result is self-evident persists in many accounts of the Roman empire, along with a blurriness about the processes involved in such change that shows up in the impersonal and imprecise

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from ‘Wanting to Die’ from *Live or Die* by Anne Sexton. Copyright © 1966 by Anne Sexton, renewed 1994 by Linda G. Sexton. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of SLL/Sterling Lord Literistic, Inc. Copyright by Linda Gray Sexton.

language used to describe it: the “spread of Roman culture” is a well-used phrase. Meanwhile, every aspect of the process has been bitterly contested in a vast scholarly literature increasingly atomized by field of enquiry (disciplinary, theoretical, chronological, and regional). At least some of these contests are political: the Roman empire, insofar as it has been *the* iconic empire for much of the history of the western world, invites us to toggle backward and forward between “our” world and that of classical antiquity, not so much because of an inert “legacy,” but because of a fraught reception history. Intellectual enquiry is inexorably tangled up in the politics of the real world through both the historical self-identification of formal and informal modern empires with Rome, and the appeal of its subjects’ identities as entities (within, before, and beyond the Roman empire) for both emergent nation-states in the nineteenth century and newly independent, decolonized states in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

In the first two sections of this chapter, I will map the major contours of these debates about change accompanying empire. I will start by considering Francis Haverfield’s analysis of the scope and processes of change attendant on empire in Latin-speaking, northern provinces, in his *The Romanization of Roman Britain*, first delivered in 1905 as a British Academy lecture, and revised and republished several times in rapid succession in the early years of the twentieth century. This foundational text, and the debates within which it situates itself, usefully introduces many of the major contests of the twentieth century, the subject of the second section of this introduction. Finally, I will trace the path taken by this book and each of its chapters, with occasional glances at disciplinary, theoretical, and chronological roads not taken.

### Talking to Haverfield

Francis Haverfield’s *The Romanization of Roman Britain* is remarkable for its sophistication. With its engagement in the newly scientific fields of anthropology and archaeology, its overtly comparative approach, and polemical insistence on the interpretative opportunities offered by non-textual material culture (especially art, ceramics, housing, town planning, and representations of the gods), it is an excellent vantage-point from

<sup>2</sup> For nation-building in Britain, see Vance 1997; Hingley 2000; Bradley 2010; Butler 2012; for the Maghreb: Mattingly 2011, chapter 2.

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which to consider the debates that would vex scholarship for much of the twentieth century, some of which are ongoing.<sup>3</sup>

*The Romanization of Roman Britain* is a small book on a grand scale: Haverfield's magisterial opening paragraphs answer the implied question of what was the greatest Roman achievement, judged by the criterion of what the Romans did for "us." Pride of place among Roman achievements is the process that Haverfield calls "Romanization," following precedents in German and French scholarship,<sup>4</sup> a process restricted to what will become the Latin-speaking west. The end-result is the erasure of local difference and substantial homogeneity "in speech, in material culture, in political feeling and religion." Haverfield insists that the process can accurately be described as "becoming Roman." For some time, and in certain places more than others, there are "traces of tribal or national sentiments or fashions" (22). These remain largely inert rather than signaling "national sentiment," although it is possible to activate them under certain conditions, notably the invasion of new groups such as the Irish, among whom such "national sentiments" are still alive (chapter 9).

If these are the end-results of "Romanization," one remarkable passage encapsulates Haverfield's conceptualization of its processes:

When the Romans spread their dominion over the island, it ["native" art] almost wholly vanished. For that we are not to blame any evil influence of this particular Empire. All native arts, however beautiful, tend to disappear before the more even technique and the neater finish of town manufactures. The process is merely part of the honour which a coherent civilization enjoys in the eyes of country folk. Disraeli somewhere describes a Syrian lady preferring the French polish of a western boot to the jewels of an eastern slipper. With a similar preference the British Celt abandoned his national art and adopted the Roman provincial fashion. (48)

This passage takes us to the heart of contemporary debates about the interplay between Roman expansion and change within the Roman imperial world, debates to which Haverfield alludes through the course of the book. The perceived relevance and urgency of the case of the Roman empire for questions and arguments about contemporary empires and nations are signaled in this passage particularly by Haverfield's intriguing vignette of the Victorian Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli's "Syrian lady,"

<sup>3</sup> Haverfield 1905; 1912; 1915; 1923. I cite the 1915 edition (the last version revised by Haverfield himself) throughout; for detailed examination of Haverfield and his intellectual contexts, see Freeman 1997; 2007. Gettel (2018) is an important discussion of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century context for Haverfield's concept of 'culture.'

<sup>4</sup> Notably Mommsen 1885.

which turns out to be an allusion to a minor character in his novel *Tancred, or the New Crusade* (1847) (Book 5, chapter 7). When Haverfield refuses to attribute the near disappearance of “native art” in Britain to the “evil influence” of the Roman empire, we think of models of empires as politically and economically exploitative that sometimes predate the “evil empire” of early twentieth-century Marxist-Leninist writings by centuries. When he writes of the natural attraction of “country folk” toward a “coherent civilization,” we think of Mommsen’s Hegelian inevitability of nations and their centripetal draw.<sup>5</sup>

As this passage suggests, Haverfield’s *Romanization of Roman Britain* effectively carves out a field by its choices of material on which to focus, the questions it asks, the answers it gives, and its silences. Power dynamics are glimpsed only at the margins of the account, even while they hang uncomfortably in the air via the vignette attributed to Disraeli in this passage. The attractions of French polish on western boots hint at military and institutional dimensions of empire that are otherwise barely seen. In the same passage, “Roman dominion” indicates the temporal and causal framework of the scene, but conquest and force are periodized out, belonging to the time before the narrative begins, and the text focuses squarely on a quotidian world of Roman Britain rather than crises, revolt, and rebellion. Political structures and institutions of imperial government (including the citizenship) are explicitly “passed over” at the beginning of the book as the monumental achievement of Mommsen (10), but the physical structures that mark Roman presence, such as Hadrian’s Wall and army camps, are likewise largely omitted, as are “imperial cult” sites and other accommodations and naturalizations of Roman imperial power.<sup>6</sup>

This passage also illustrates beautifully Haverfield’s conceptualization of how change happens in the process of “Romanization,” and the status of that change. For the “Syrian lady,” it is a comprehensive, bottom-up, cognitive, rational change that involves recognizing the truth of “coherence.” Elsewhere in the work, Haverfield contrasts the degree to which change and assimilation are achieved in the western Roman empire with the incomplete mission of European empires. In the western Roman empire, he argues, there were no racial barriers to obstruct a process that involves not just stylistic and aesthetic change, but a total realignment of

<sup>5</sup> ‘Evil empires’ before Marxist-Leninist traditions: succinctly Armitage 2000; cf. Hobson 1902; Lenin 1939. Mommsen and the centripetal draw of nations: Mouritsen 1998.

<sup>6</sup> The major exception is urbanization, which functions as an index of ‘Romanization’ in Haverfield 1915, chapter 6.

hearts and minds. The “Asiatic” or “African” of Haverfield’s contemporary world may put on western clothes temporarily and instrumentally, for “profit or pleasure,” but the Roman provincial equivalent puts on the clothes, consciously recognizes the value of civilization that they represent, and simultaneously switches his loyalty to Rome (20). While in the passage quoted above the “native” element does not wholly disappear, all that is left is a tiny bit of its aesthetic that comes out in Romano-British representations of animals and monsters, a touch of liveliness and vigor amidst what Haverfield sees as the conformist and imitative downside of the process of “Romanization” (chapter 5). This liveliness and vigor are a reflex rather than an indicator of the identity and allegiance of the ancient Britons: any remaining “national” sentiment lies dormant, a silent genetic trait that will reemerge only when the arrival of new, unaltered native peoples stimulate it.

Haverfield distinguishes these processes of secular change from the pragmatic polytheism that he imagines in the pre-Christian ancient world, where a man who changed his town or province “could change his gods as easily as his washerwoman,” while “Roman” and “native” were “harmoniously intertwined” in a “blending-vat of worships.” This easy religious boundary crossing, or functional god-changing that involved no inner crisis, could not be more different from the modern world, where, Haverfield says, “no man can be in any real sense Mahometan and Jew at once” (67). The distinction that he draws between secular and religious processes of change in the pre-Christian Roman empire interestingly maps rather neatly on to the distinction that A. D. Nock would draw several decades later between conversion to a “prophetic” religion (Judaism, Christianity, or Islam) and the experience of religious change in the “pagan” world. Haverfield’s vision of the ease of changing and combining gods sounds very much like Nock’s notion of being outside of “prophetic religion”, where individuals experience unexciting, functional, gradual change including “borrowing,” “fusion,” and “adhesion” rather than “any definite crossing of religious frontiers” (1933, 6–7). Haverfield’s vision of secular change, of “becoming Roman,” will be mirrored by Nock’s characterization of conversion to a “prophetic” religion as typically involving a profound, conscious, and rational recognition of truth and an identity shift from one state of being to another, with no going back (1933, esp. 1–16).

I am of course not arguing for a specific connection between Haverfield’s model of secular change in the Roman empire and Nock’s of religious conversion: that would be a chronological impossibility. But I do want to highlight the degree to which notions of cultural assimilation

and Christianization were broadly interlinked in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because of the particular expectations of empire at that time. In this context, it is well worth wondering what baggage early usage of the noun “Romanization” by Haverfield and others carried with it, before it became narrowly the specialist (if very problematic) term that it is for us today. Among historical (and, in the twenty-first century, largely obsolete) usages of the English verb “to Romanize,” “Romanization,” “Romanized,” and “Romanizing,” it is easy to forget the importance from the seventeenth century of the heavily pejorative sense of “going Catholic” on the part of Protestants. The noun “Romanization” was historically used of the transliteration process into “Roman” letters that was associated primarily with Jesuit missions to East and South Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Haverfield’s engagement with contemporary debates that envisaged religious change at the center of an imperial project of assimilation is implicit in his allusion to Disraeli’s “Syrian lady.” Within the context of Disraeli’s novel *Tancred: or the New Crusade*, the “Syrian lady,” one Thérèse de Laurella, has learned through her education in Marseilles to despise Syria and be ashamed of her own Jewish origins (Book 5, chapter 7). The novel is a parody of misguided colonialism and assimilation tendencies, which one would not guess from Haverfield’s allusion. It is, however, telling that a novel of this kind, one that directly confronts European colonialism, missionary activities, and political intervention in the “Holy Land” in the course of its protagonist’s quest for a spiritual purity lost in the travesties of established religion in contemporary England, was very much on Haverfield’s mind while he was writing *The Romanization of Roman Britain*.

Haverfield’s *The Romanization of Roman Britain*, then, represents a particular fusion of the comparative study of empire with contemporary ideas about nationalism, colonialism, and religious conversion that would underlie fundamental notions of change attendant on the Roman empire for much of the twentieth century. It is worth emphasizing that textual sources of the earlier and “high” Roman empires rarely ethnicize change attendant on empire, in ancient equivalents of “becoming Roman.”<sup>8</sup> Strabo, the early first-century CE Augustan geographer, is the major exception, when he characterizes the Spanish Turdetani as having

<sup>7</sup> See *Oxford English Dictionary* for historical usage of ‘Romanize,’ ‘Romanization,’ ‘Romanizing,’ and ‘Romanized’; problematizing ‘Romanization’: e.g., Barrett 1997; Freeman 1997.

<sup>8</sup> For reservations about the ethnicization of change in the Roman empire, see Vanacker and Zuiderhoek 2017.

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“completely changed over to the way of the Romans.” But even for Strabo this is unusual: he elsewhere introduces qualifiers when characterizing change (3, 2, 15; cf. 4, 1, 12; 5, 4, 7). In Tacitus *Agricola* 21, the ancient literary source most frequently cited as evidence in discussions of “Romanization,” Agricola’s encouragement of the ancient Britons to succumb to quiet and peace is characterized in the traditional moralizing terms of imperial discourse, while the “real” end-point of the process (as opposed to the *humanitas*, usually translated as “civilization,” that the Britons perceive it to be) is the equally traditional servitude. The political/ethnic vocabulary of “becoming Roman” does not appear here at all.<sup>9</sup>

This should not surprise us. Roman identity meant something quite specific in the early Empire. Roman citizenship had long been extended to the freed slaves of Roman citizens, remarkably to Greek eyes, and, from the middle Republic, to the inhabitants of certain communities in Italy, including some of Rome’s former enemies. The traditional assumption was that Roman citizenship would entail direct participation in the obligations and privileges of the Roman state, including the political institutions of the city of Rome. It is significant that our best ancient evidence for peoples said to “become” or “be made” Romans before late antiquity comes from Republican-period texts or from narrative accounts of Republican-period history.<sup>10</sup> This assumption of direct participation in the Roman state’s and city of Rome’s political institutions was progressively challenged by the extension of the citizenship in the decades following the Social War of 91–89 BCE to all communities of peninsular Italy, and to the communities of Cisalpine Gaul in 49 BCE, by the increasing diaspora of Roman citizens outside Italy (particularly military veterans settled in Roman colonies overseas), and by the growing expectation in the last decades of the Republic that the citizenship was *de facto* in the gift of individuals. In discursive contexts of the late Republic and early Empire, we find intense engagement with myths of Roman ethnic hybridity and legal and social mobility, in addition to Cicero’s famous reflection on dual citizenship (*Laws* 2, 5), that of Rome and that of one’s local Italian town. In terms of more general experience, Roman citizenship in the Empire was regularly inflected as a privilege or honor claimed and enjoyed within the context of one’s local community. The argument that it substantially remained as

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller discussion of ancient intellectual modes of conceptualizing behavioral change attendant on empire, see Dench 2005, 80–91, with bibliography.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., “nos sumus Romani qui fuimus ante Rudini,” “We are Romans, who were once Rudini” (Ennius *Ann.* 524–5 Skutsch); Sherwin-White 1973, chapter 2.

such until the Edict of Caracalla in 212 CE, which extended citizenship to almost the whole free population of the Roman Empire, is reinforced by Myles Lavan's recent estimate of the percentage of Roman citizens at the beginning of the third century CE, somewhere between 15 percent and 33 percent. He has also emphasized the unaccelerated rhythm of extensions in the later first and second centuries CE. Traditional arguments about a "flood tide" of extensions diminishing the value of the Roman citizenship before the Edict are now untenable.<sup>11</sup>

As Michael Maas and Neil McLynn have eloquently shown, late antique characterizations of the process of conquest, change, and rule can be significantly and strikingly different from Tacitus' depiction of Agricola in Britain, the most interventionist of early imperial texts. While Agricola works on the sidelines by cheering the Britons on, giving a helping hand, rewarding and scolding them, and working on their competitive spirit, early Byzantine emperors are not just in the thick of it but on top of it, abolishing "bestial" and "barbarous" practices such as inheritance practices and castration. While Tacitus' hoodwinked Britons think they are getting *humanitas*, but are actually succumbing to slavery, the addressees of early Byzantine decrees and characters in early Byzantine ethnographical passages are left in no doubt that they are being given *Roman* laws and lifestyles in place of "bestial" or "barbarous" ones. Perhaps the most striking difference is that top-down, imposed religious change goes hand-in-hand with changing to Roman laws and practices: "barbarians" in these accounts change their *diaita*, "lifestyle," for the gentler, and change their *doxa*, their belief system, to Christianity. This is a very significant development within an ethnographical discourse that is generally quite conservative. This development involves importing and adapting a new vocabulary: the noun *doxa* is borrowed from disputes about the borderlines between orthodoxy and heresy among groups claiming to be Christians. These representations still do much more than merely describe the complicated world in which they were produced, but suggest both the increased, assertive ideal of Romans versus "barbarians" in the particular conditions of late antiquity and the paradigm-shifting character of monotheism.<sup>12</sup> The specific conditions of the late antique/early Medieval world arguably formed a striking alliance with the specific conditions of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century west to persuade us of a very particular

<sup>11</sup> Mouritsen 1998; Dench 2005, chapter 2; Purcell 2005a; Lavan 2016; "flood tide": Sherwin-White 1973, chapter 10.

<sup>12</sup> Maas 2003; McLynn 2003.



understanding of the nature of change attendant on Roman imperial conquest and rule.

### One Hundred Years of Imperial Change

The broad lines in the sand that Haverfield both observed and drew largely continued to demarcate territories of enquiry for much of the twentieth century, with expertise and an ever-increasing volume of evidence encouraging further splintering and atomization along chronological, methodological, disciplinary, and regional lines. The largest rift was between “politics,” almost universally the domain of “the Romans,” and “culture,” almost universally that of “natives.” However, much we might regret the splintering and atomization of discussions, this process also encouraged considerable refinement of source bases, questions, and argument.

Among the subfields within which the broad study of the Roman empire and its impact was divided, one of the largest focused on the “formative” processes of conquest and imperial coming of age between the middle Republic and the early first century BCE. This was a subfield with almost exclusive focus on “the Romans” as political and military actors, whether conquest and expansion were viewed primarily as defensive or as aggressive, and even if “the Romans” were considered on location, within a sphere of military action. One major exception that challenged this close focus on “the Romans” was the emerging subfield of Greek perspectives on and engagement with the Roman empire. Examples of this emerging subfield include Erich Gruen’s important *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (1984), as well as Polybian studies, and the extraordinary epigraphic contributions of Louis Robert and others. It was characterized by serious enquiry into Greek political ideas within the Roman empire, long before this was fashionable, and without assigning Greek activity to a category of “culture” that tended to exclude “politics.”<sup>13</sup> Ernst Badian’s *Foreign Clientelae (264–70 BC)*, first published in 1958, exaggerates the prevalence of patronage (in the formalized, Roman sense rather than the more general modern sociological concept of enduring, unequal, reciprocal relationships) in Roman Republican imperial contexts.

<sup>13</sup> For a sample of approaches to “the Romans” as military and political actors, see Champion 2004b, chs. 1–2; for a superior treatment of ‘the Romans’ on location, see Richardson 1986; formative Polybian studies include Walbank 1957–1979; 1972; Derow 1979; Champion 2004b; cf. Smith and Yarrow 2012; Gibson and Harrison 2013; Greek political ideas: for Louis Robert, see, succinctly, Rousset 2012; serious early treatments of Greek political ideas include Millar 1964; Bowersock 1965; 1969; Bowie 1970; Jones 1971; 1978; Crawford 1978.

However, the book is path-breaking in its vision of imperial sway as a network of complex, competing asymmetrical relationships, as opposed to a narrower view of exclusively Roman political and military action.<sup>14</sup>

Thinking of Rome's Republican empire as primarily a problem that concerned the Roman state, its principal actors, its army, and its institutions of government might not have left much space for considering the agency and contexts of peoples within spheres of engagement, but it undoubtedly had broader implications for the ways in which scholarship framed and judged the imperial project. The acquisition of empire, its early steps elided with the dynastic escalations of the late Republic, continued to function implicitly as a prelude and backdrop to a focus on "culture" within individual provinces, as it had in Haverfield's account. Judgment on whether imperial acquisition was Rome's fault rather than an accident, necessary self-defense or an act of benevolence to posterity would substantially inform understanding of the imperial project. Rome's acquisition and management of empire was generally reckoned to fall somewhere along a scale running between enslavement and the bringing of civilization. The representation of Roman imperial processes as a story in two distinct parts (with a rough divide at the Augustan principate), the politics and warfare of conquest and the cultural effects, viewed at and from the provincial level, to a considerable extent continues in the arrangement of overviews and sourcebooks, particularly those aimed at students. A third distinct area, "Roman government of the empire," might be added, including institutions, law and taxation, and regional or province-based enquiries rooted in specific kinds of evidence: the epigraphy of the "Greek city"; the papyrology of (especially) Egypt; the archaeology of northern and western provinces.<sup>15</sup>

In the later decades of the twentieth century, amidst the very different politics of decolonization and postcolonialism, much energy was invested in shifting focus away from Romanocentric approaches and onto the agency and distinct agenda of local peoples of empire, building narratives of resistance and, to quote from the title of David Mattingly's important edited volume, "discrepant experience." Even if they tended ultimately to enforce the binary distinction between "Romans" and "natives," and to

<sup>14</sup> For recent reappraisals, see Eilers 2002; Jehne and Pina Polo 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Thinking of provinces as a distinct topic separable from the politics of imperial acquisition is arguably in part a legacy of Mommsen's *Römische Geschichte* (vols. 1–3: 1854–1856; vol. 5: 1885), its overall program distorted by the fact that Mommsen himself never completed the fourth volume, on the Empire (of the Caesars); recent overviews and sourcebooks that substantially maintain this division include Champigny 2004b; Erskine 2010; Hoyos 2013.