

Caesar Rules

For centuries, Roman emperors ruled a vast empire. Yet, at least officially, the emperor did not exist. No one knew exactly what titles he possessed, how he could be portrayed, what exactly he had to do or how the succession was organised. Everyone knew, however, that the emperor held ultimate power over the empire. There were also expectations about what he should do and be, although these varied throughout the empire and also evolved over time. How did these expectations develop and change? To what degree could an emperor deviate from the prevailing norms? And what role did major developments in Roman society – such as the rise of Christianity or the choice of Constantinople as the new capital – play in the ways in which emperors could exercise their rule? This ambitious and engaging book describes the surprising stability of the Roman Empire over more than six centuries of history.

Olivier Hekster is Professor of Ancient History at the Radboud Institute for Culture and History, Radboud University Nijmegen. He is chair of the international network ‘Impact of Empire’, and a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Academia Europaea. His publications include *Emperors and Ancestors: Roman Power and the Constraints of Tradition* (2015).

Caesar Rules

The Emperor in the Changing Roman World
(c. 50 BC–AD 565)

OLIVIER HEKSTER

Radboud University Nijmegen



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477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
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To the memory of Fergus Millar (1935–2019)

Anything that happens, happens.

Anything that, in happening, causes something else to happen, causes something else to happen.

Anything that, in happening, causes itself to happen again, happens again.

It doesn't necessarily do it in chronological order, though.
Douglas Adams, *Mostly Harmless* (1992)

You must know that, although I have used the term 'expectations' more than once, you are not endowed with expectations only.

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (1861)

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Preface

This book brings together almost twenty-five years of thinking, reading and writing about Roman emperorship. In that time I have been helped along by many friends, colleagues, students and teachers. Looking back over the years, it becomes apparent how much of humanities research is teamwork, with insights taking shape in conversation – more or less heated – or written debate. Many of the ideas in this book, moreover, found their origins whilst I was teaching or being taught. So before acknowledging the help of those who directly eased the writing of this book, I want to take the opportunity to thank all my students for their ceaseless questions and repeated requests to explain myself more clearly. I also want to thank my teachers over the years. They are too many to mention all. Some stand out. First and foremost, Fergus Millar, to whom I owe so much. This book is, in many ways, a continuation of a conversation we've had since I entered his rooms at Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1998. Even then, remarkably, he took me seriously, correcting my many errors but never trying to make me change my point of view. That we can no longer have this discussion, nor coffee at the Oxford Playhouse or the Oriental Institute, still saddens me profoundly. It is with immense gratitude that I dedicate this book to his memory. Others were important too. That material culture plays such a pronounced part in my research is mainly thanks to Margareta Steinby, Bert Smith, Chris Howgego and Eric Moormann, who at various stages introduced me to the value (and pitfalls) of different categories of ancient sources. Luuk de Blois, John Rich and the late Thomas Wiedemann introduced me to the intricacies of Roman leadership and challenged me to develop my own points of view. To all of them, my thanks.

At a different level, this book is the end product of a generous five-year research programme that was financed by the Dutch Research Council (NWO). It allowed a team of dedicated scholars to jointly explore the role of 'constraints and tradition' in the formulation of Roman power. Their research underlies countless observations in this book, as testified in the notes and bibliography. Many thanks, therefore, to Sam Heijnen, Ketty Iannantuono, Dennis Jussen and Daniel Syrbe for our close cooperation over the past years; to Sven Betjes for the same and for providing me with

numerous numismatic graphs; and to Erika Manders for her ideas and friendship, but especially for keeping us all on track and effectively running the project. Working on a shared subject with so many enthusiastic and intelligent colleagues has been strikingly productive, and more importantly, it has been fun. My Nijmegen colleagues Lien Foubert, Nathalie de Haan, Stephan Mols, Danielle Slootjes (now in Amsterdam) and especially Maaïke van Berkel have created the context in which we were able to work productively and discussed ideas and concepts with us at regular occasions. The Faculty of Arts at the Radboud University has been systematically supportive in allowing me time to write. I cannot think of a better place in which to work.

Most of this book was written during the time of the COVID pandemic. This has made me appreciate more than before the importance of a good research library, notwithstanding the ever-increasing availability of digitised books and articles. I am extremely grateful to Johannes Hahn and Hans Beck for hosting me at Münster several times in the past year, for allowing me access to the splendid libraries in the Fürstenberghaus and for our discussions about Roman emperors and football. Other colleagues were kind enough to send me forthcoming work, answer questions or suggest relevant literature. Many thanks to Rhiannon Ash, Hennig Börm, Lien Foubert, Corey Ellinthorpe, Sander Evers, Danielle Slootjes and Shaun Tougher. Before COVID restrictions made travel nearly impossible, I was able to discuss many aspects of this book at lectures and workshops in Amsterdam, Chicago, Durham, Giessen, Pamplona, Nijmegen, Münster, Pavia, Toronto, Tübingen and Vienna. Comments on the various papers that I presented there have had a profound impact on this book. Willy Piron's work in obtaining images and the rights to publish them has been a great support, as has Sven Betjes' work in creating indexes and getting the book ready for production. Michael Sharp was an exemplary editor, and his enthusiasm for the project has been more important than he probably realises. Also at CUP, Katie Idle, Natasha Burton and Franklin Mathews Jebaraj guided the complicated process of turning a manuscript into a book, and the sharp eye of Rosemary Morlin corrected a worrying number of inconsistencies. My heartfelt thanks to all of them.

During the actual writing of the book, I have been helped immensely by several friends and colleagues, who went out of their way to read and comment upon one or more chapters. Their advice has improved the book beyond measure. So my heartfelt thanks to Cailan Davenport, Jaś Elsner, Angela Hug, Ben Kelly, Eric Moormann, Miguel John Versluys and, above all, Jo Quinn, who read various drafts of all of the chapters with amazing

cheer and eye for detail. Jo's impact on this book has been immense – the least of which is that I will never use the verb 'to impact' again.

As ever, I was able to count on Thijs Goverde, Edwin van Meerkerk and Ted Kaizer to discuss life, the Roman world and everything, and on Birgit, Hannah and Leonie for unreserved support – even if that meant being away from home for stretches of time to work in the Münster libraries. They are unlikely to read this book, but without them I could not have written it.

Timeline

*Emperors and Prominent Usurpers*¹

Augustus	28/27 BC–AD 14
Tiberius	14–37
Gaius (Caligula)	37–41
Claudius	41–54
Nero	54–68
Galba	68–9
Otho	69
Vitellius	69
Vespasian	69–79
Titus	79–81
Domitian	81–96
Nerva	96–8
Trajan	98–117
Hadrian	117–38
Antoninus Pius	138–61
Marcus Aurelius	161–80
Avidius Cassius	175
Lucius Verus	161–9
Commodus	176–92
Pertinax	193
Didius Julianus	193
Septimius Severus	193–211
Pescennius Niger	193–4
Clodius Albinus	193–7
Caracalla	198–217
Geta	209–11
Macrinus	217–18
Diadumenianus	218
Elagabalus	218–22

¹ Men appointed as Augustus by a ruling Augustus or accepted by the Senate have been included as emperors. For Tetrarchic emperors, years indicate their elevation to ‘Caesar’. Prominent other rulers and selected usurpers are included to provide an overview.

Severus Alexander	222–35
L. Seius Sallustius	225(?)–7(?)
Maximinus Thrax	235–8
Magnus	235
Gordian I	238
Gordian II	238
Balbinus	238
Pupienus	238
Gordian III	238–44
Sabinianus	240
Philip Arabs	244–9
Pacatianus	248
Jotapianus	249–?
Silbannacus	c. 249
Sponsianus	?
Decius	249–51
L. (?) Priscus	250
Herennius Decius	251
Hostilianus	251
Trebonianus Gallus	251–3
Uranus Antoninus	253
Volusianus	251–3
Aemilianus	253
Valerian	253–60
Gallienus	253–68
Macrianus	260–1
Quietus	260–1
Valens	261
Aureolus	268
 <i>Palmyrene Empire (260–72)</i>	
Septimius Odaenathus	260–7
Vaballathus	267–72
Zenobia	267–72
Antiochus	272
 <i>Gallic Empire (260–74)</i>	
Postumus	260–9
Laelianus	269
Marius	269
Victorinus	269–71
Tetricus I	271–4
Tetricus II	273–4

Claudius II Gothicus	268–70
Quintillus	270
Aurelian	270–5
Domitian (II)	271
Urbanus	271/2
Septimius	271/2
Tacitus	275–6
Florianus	276
Probus	276–82
Saturninus	280
Bonosus	280–1
Proculus	280–1
Carus	282–3
Carinus	283–5
Numerianus	283–4
Marcus Aur. Julianus	283
Sabinus Julianus	284/5
Diocletian	284–305
Domitius Domitianus	297
Maximian	285–310
Amandus	285
 <i>British Empire (286–96)</i>	
Carausius	286–93
Allectus	293–6
Galerius	293–311
Constantius	293–306
Maximinus Daia	305–13
Severus II	305–7
Constantine I	306–37
Maxentius	306–12
Domitius Alexander	308–11
Licinius	308–24
Valerius Valens	314
Martinianus	324
Constantine II	337–40
Constans	337–50
Constantius II	337–61
Magnentius	350–3
Nepotianus	350
Vetranio	350
Julian	360–3

Jovian	363–4
Valentinian I	364–75
Valens	364–78
Procopius	365–6
Gratian	367–83
Valentinian II	375–92
Magnus Maximus	383–8
Flavius Victor	384/387–8
Theodosius I	379–95
Eugenius	392–4

Emperors of the West (395–476)

Honorius	395–423
Constantine III	409–11
Constans II	409–11
Maximus	409–11
Priscus Attalus	409–10
	414–15
Jovinus	411–13
Constantius III	421
Joannes	423–5
Valentinian III	425–55
Petronius Maximus	455
Avitus	455–6
Majorian	457–61
Libius Severus	461–5
Anthemius	467–72
Olybrius	472
Glycerius	473–4
Julius Nepos	474–5
Romulus Augustus	475–6

Rulers of Italy

Odoacer	476–93
Theodoric	493–526
Athalaric	526–34
Theodahad	534–6
Vitigis	536–40
Totila	541–52

Emperors of the East (395–565)

Arcadius	395–408
Theodosius II	408–50

Marcian	450–7
Leo I	457–74
Leo II	474
Zeno	474–91
Leontius	484–8
Basiliscus	475–6
Anastasius I	491–518
Justin I	518–27
Justinian I	527–65

Persian Kings

Shapur I	240–70
Shapur II	309–79
Khusro I	531–79

Abbreviations

AE	= <i>L'Année épigraphique</i> (Paris 1888–)
AJA	= <i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANRW	= H. Temporini / W. Haase (eds.), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> (Berlin 1972–98)
AntTard	= <i>Antiquité Tardive</i>
BCEA	= <i>Bulletin canadien des études anciennes</i>
BJ	= <i>Bonner Jahrbuch</i>
BMCRE	= H. Mattingly, <i>Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum</i> (London 1965)
CAH	= <i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CIL	= <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (Berlin 1863–)
CIS	= <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum</i> (Paris 1881–1962)
CPhil	= <i>Classical Philology</i>
CQ	= <i>Classical Quarterly</i>
HSCP	= <i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
IAM	= <i>Inscriptions antiques du Maroc</i> (Paris 1966–2003)
ICret	= M. Guarducci (ed.), <i>Inscriptiones Creticae</i> (Rome 1935–50)
ILAlg.	= S. Gsell (ed.), <i>Inscriptiones latines de l'Algérie</i> (Paris–Algiers 1922, 1957)
I.Eph.	= H. Wankel (ed.), <i>Die Inschriften von Ephesos</i> (Bonn 1979–84)
IG	= <i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> (Berlin 1873–)
IGLS	= L. Jalabert/ R. Mouterde, <i>Inscriptiones Graecae et Latinae de la Syrie</i> (Paris 1929–)
ILS	= <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> (Berlin 1892–1916)
IMEM	= <i>Proceedings of the Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire c. 200 B.C.–A.D. 476)</i>
JAHA	= <i>Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology</i>
JDAI	= <i>Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i>
JRA	= <i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRH	= <i>Journal of Religious History</i>
JRS	= <i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>

- LSA = Last Statues of Antiquities
 LTUR = *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* (Rome 1993–2000)
 MAAR = *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*
 MDAI (R) = *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* (Rome)
 MEFRA = *Melanges de l'École Française de Rome – Antiquité*
 NC = *Numismatic Chronicle*
 OCRE = Online Coins of the Roman Empire
 OGIS = Wilhelm Dittenberger (ed.), *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* (Leipzig 1903–5)
 PanLat = *Panegyrici Latini*
 PBSR = *Papers of the British School in Rome*
 P.Col. = W. L. Westerman/C. W. Keyes (eds), *Columbia Papyri* (New York–Atlanta 1929–98)
 P.Coll.Youtie = A. E. Hanson (ed.), *Collectanea Papyrologica: Texts Published in Honor of H. C. Youtie* (Bonn 1979)
 PIR = *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*
 PLRE = *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*
 P.Oxy = B. P. Grenfell/A. S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London 1898–)
 REA = *Revue des Études Anciennes*
 REAL = A. Pauly/G. Wissowa/W. Kroll, *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (1893–)
 RGDA = *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*
 RIC = H. Mattingly (ed.), *Roman Imperial Coinage* (London 1913–56)
 RIPD = Roman Imperial Portraits Dataset
 RMD = M. M. Roxan, *Roman Military Diplomas* (London 1978–2006)
 RN = *Revue Numismatique*
 RPC = *Roman Provincial Coinage* (London 1992–)
 RPh = *Revue de Philologie*
 RRC = M. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* (Cambridge 1974)
 RSC = H. A. Seaby/D. A. Sear/R. Loosley/C. E. King, *Roman Silver Coins* (London 1952–89)
 SB = F. Preisigke, *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten* (1913–2016)

SCPP	= W. Eck/A. Caballos/F. Fernández, <i>Das Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre</i> (Munich 1996)
SEG	= <i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
SIG	= W. Dittenberger (ed.), <i>Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecorum</i> (Leipzig 1915–24)
SNG Levante	= <i>Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum, Levante-Cilicia</i>
SO	= <i>Symbolae Osloenses. Norwegian Journal of Greek and Latin Studies</i>
TAPA	= <i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
ZPE	= <i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Abbreviations of the works of ancient authors follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*.