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978-1-107-02601-8 - Slaves to Rome: Paradigms of Empire in Roman Culture

Myles Lavan

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

The ambitions and aspirations of imperial powers deserve just as much scrutiny as their actual practice. This book investigates how the elite that governed the Roman empire envisaged their shared imperial project. It does so by exploring how Roman writers draw on the paradigmatic power relations of everyday life – notably those of masters and slaves, patrons and clients, and parents and children – in order to conceptualise and represent the subjection of the provinces. It examines the relative importance of these different models for empire across almost three centuries of Latin literature, from the middle of the first century BCE through to the beginning of the third CE. It draws particular attention to the prominence of the language and imagery of chattel slavery in Roman accounts of empire. These tropes of Roman mastery and provincial slavery epitomise an aspect of Roman imperialism that is insufficiently acknowledged in modern scholarship on this period. This book is simultaneously a study in elite self-definition, highlighting the imperial character of the identity espoused by most Roman writers. These men see themselves as members of a ruling power, elevated above the subject peoples who comprise most of the population of the empire.

Three points deserve to be clarified at the outset. First, this is a book about imperialism, not the principate. By ‘imperialism’, I mean ‘the practice, the theories and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory’.¹ If ‘empire’, like *imperium* in Latin, blurs the distinction between monarchy and the conquest and rule of foreign peoples, it is because the Roman emperors and later monarchs invested so much in the idea that the two are inextricably linked.² Rome had an empire long before it

¹ The definition is borrowed from Said 1993 p. 8.

² On the process by which the noun *imperium* came to be used both of Rome’s territorial empire and of the monarchical power of the emperor, see Richardson 2008 (especially p. 185) and Nicolet 1991 p. 15. On the importance of conquest and empire to the ideology

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had an emperor and that empire continued to be seen as distinctly ‘Roman’ (whatever that might mean) long after the creation of the monarchy. Second, the focus is on Rome’s provincial subjects, not the ‘barbarians’. The distinction between civilisation and barbarism, between the inhabitants of the empire (or at least its civilised communities) and the barbarians at its margins, obviously played an important role in the ideology and practice of Roman imperialism.³ But this book aims to draw attention to a different division, one that is imposed squarely upon the population of the empire, by focusing on the peoples whom Roman texts most often label ‘the allies’ (*socii*) – distinguished from those beyond the reach of Roman power by their incorporation into the empire and dependence on Rome but also marked off from their Roman rulers by some combination of citizen status, geography, ethnicity and culture (an ambiguity I return to below).⁴ Third, this is a study of language. It explores how men who saw themselves as members of an imperial people described their power over the peoples they regarded as their subjects. But it assumes that these discursive practices were inextricably bound up with the operations of Roman power in the provinces. The literary texts discussed in this book emerged from, and circulated within, the same social milieu that supplied the governors and other officials who administered the provinces. The contrasting paradigms of masterly, patronal and parental authority embody very different perspectives on the ethics of empire and the proper ends and means of provincial governance. These tropes must have both reflected and guided their conduct as governors, commanders and administrators. Susan Mattern has examined the values that guided this governing elite in its dealings with ‘the enemy’ – the barbarians

of the principate, see Ando 2000 ch. 8. The interdependence of empire and monarchy was reaffirmed by the early-modern monarchies. See e.g. Wortman 1995–2000 pp. 6–7 and Pagden 1995, especially chs. 1 and 2.

³ On the tropes of barbarism in Roman discourse and visual culture, see especially Dauge 1981 and Ferris 2000 and Schneider 1986 respectively. On the ideological significance of the distinction between civilisation and barbarism for Roman imperialism, see especially Woolf 1998 ch. 3, Woolf 1993b, Veyne 1993 and Alföldi 1952. These focus on barbarians beyond the frontier; for ‘internal’ barbarians, see especially Shaw 2000.

⁴ This is not to claim that Romans always regarded the subject peoples as a homogeneous group. Roman texts are replete with particular ethnic stereotypes. See especially Isaac 2004 and Balsdon 1979.

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beyond the frontier.⁵ This book explores the norms that governed their interactions with ‘the allies’ – the peoples they regarded as their subjects.

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Roman texts draw on a wide range of metaphors to describe the imperial project. Representations of the empire as a body or a vast fabric or structure serve to assert its unity and indissolubility.⁶ Similar metaphors serve to affirm the primacy of the city of Rome – as the head (*caput*) of the empire or, in Valerius Maximus’ formulation, the keystone (*columen*) of the world.⁷ Pastoral metaphors describe the condition of the provinces. Tiberius is said to have warned some governors who were over-eager to tax the provinces that a good shepherd should shear his flock, not skin them.⁸ Another trope is to represent the provinces as an extension of a metaphorical household. Cicero writes that Cato used to call Sicily the ‘larder (*cella penaria*) of the state’ and

⁵ Mattern 1999.

⁶ Suetonius writes that Augustus treated the allied kings ‘like limbs and parts of the empire’ (*nec aliter uniuersos [sc. reges socios] quam membra partisue imperii curae habuit*, Suet. *Aug.* 48). The metaphor of organic unity is familiar from domestic political discourse. Perhaps the most famous example is the speech by Menenius Agrippa telling the plebs that their hostility to the senate is as misguided as it would be for the limbs of a body to defy the belly (Livy 2.32.9–12). See further Heubner 1963–82 ad Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.1 and Momigliano 1942 pp. 117–18. On the *corpus imperii*, see especially Kienast 1982 and Béranger 1953 pp. 218–38. For the empire as a fabric or structure, see e.g. Cerialis’ warning to rebellious Gauls that the empire is a *compages* that has coalesced over eight hundred years and cannot be torn asunder without bringing destruction on them all (*octingentorum annorum fortuna disciplinaque compages haec coaluit, quae conuelli sine exitio conuellentium non potest*, Tac. *Hist.* 4.74.3). Compare the description of the empire as a fabric (*contextus*) at Sen. *Clem.* 1.4.2.

⁷ Rome is variously described as *caput orbis*, *c~ orbis terrarum*, *c~ rerum*, *c~ mundi* and *c~ imperii* (TLL s.v. *caput* 426.29–54). The metaphor of city as *caput* is not specific to Rome, but is regularly used of the chief cities of peoples or regions. See *ibid.* 425.74–426.29. The same metaphor is enlisted in the justification of monarchy – a healthy body having a single head. See especially Béranger 1953 pp. 218–38. For architectural metaphors, see e.g. Val. Max. 2.8.praef. (*disciplina militaris acriter retenta ... ortumque e parua Romuli casa totius terrarum orbis fecit columen*) and *ibid.* 8.14.1 (*totiusque terrarum orbis summum columen arx Capitolina possideret*).

⁸ *praesidibus onerandas tributo prouincias suadentibus rescripsit boni pastoris esse tondere pecus, non deglubere* (Suet. *Tib.* 32.2). Aelius Aristides criticises the Persians for not knowing how to rule as shepherds – an art the Romans, he implies, have mastered (*Or.* 26.18).

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himself describes the provinces as ‘country estates (*praedia*) as it were of the Roman people’.⁹ Livy describes Syracuse as the ‘granary and treasury (*horreum atque aerarium*) of the Roman people’.¹⁰ Other metaphors are more idiosyncratic. The second-century historian Florus, for example, communicates the relentlessness of Roman expansion by comparing it both to a forest fire (*ignis*) and to a disease (*contagium*) that overwhelms its victims one by one.¹¹

The list of figurative representations of empire could easily be extended, but that is not the aim of this book. I focus more narrowly on a set of metaphors, comparisons and analogies with a special paradigmatic importance – those drawn from the world of social relations.¹² To compare Roman power and authority to that of a master, patron or parent or, conversely, to represent provincial subjection and dependency in terms of slavery, clientage or childhood is to conceptualise empire in terms of the concrete and familiar power structures of daily life. These metaphors are particularly revealing because they show how empire is imagined to be like and unlike everyday practices of domination that will have been intimately familiar to the elite, most of whom were themselves masters, patrons and parents (among other roles). The assertion of continuities and discontinuities between different domains of power is an important ideological operation in any society. In Roman culture this is particularly true of attempts to define the proper limits of the masterly mode of domination. This can be

⁹ Larder: *itaque ille M. Cato Sapiens cellam penariam rei publicae nostrae, nutricem plebis Romanae Siciliam nominabat* (2Verr. 2.5). On the second metaphor in Cato’s dictum, the (usually servile) wet nurse, see further p. 113. Estate: *quasi quaedam praedia populi Romani sunt uectigalia nostra atque prouinciae*. (2Verr. 2.7). Cf. *Leg. agr.* 2.80 where Capua is the Roman people’s finest estate (*fundus*).

¹⁰ *horreum atque aerarium quondam populi Romani* (Livy 26.32.3). Elsewhere in Livy, Capua is Rome’s granary (*uberrimus ager marique propinquus ad uarietates annonae horreum populi Romani fore uidebatur*, 7.31.1).

¹¹ Florus 1.18(2).1 and 1.3.8. See further p. 102.

¹² In my focus on paradigmatic social relationships I obviously owe much to Matthew Roller’s study of the metaphors of master and father in representations of the principate (Roller 2001 ch. 4), though I depart from his approach to conceptual metaphor (see n. 59 below). Another inspiration was Foucault 1979, an analysis of the historical significance of the intrusion of the language of the household into political discourse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Cf. also Purcell 1986, a short but suggestive discussion of the master, the commander and the judge as the three paradigms of governance in Roman culture.

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seen, for example, in claims that husbands should not behave like masters to their wives or in the repeated insistence that an emperor should not behave like a master to other Roman citizens (or at least his senatorial peers).¹³ The significance of such claims lies precisely in the paradigmatic importance of the master–slave relationship as the extreme example of absolute power exercised without constraint or limit and without any obligation for the welfare of the dependant.

These metaphors are also important because they constitute a structured system of mutually exclusive paradigms which lend themselves to the task of delineating other, more abstract power structures such as empire. Matthew Roller has demonstrated that the contrasting figures of the master and father are central to debate about the powers, duties and legitimacy of the princeps in the Julio-Claudian period.¹⁴ This book shows that social relations play a similarly paradigmatic role in discourse about empire. But they are configured quite differently. Whereas mastery is almost invariably a negative paradigm when applied to the principate, serving to exemplify the behaviour of a tyrannical ruler, it often provides a normative model for Roman rule, with Roman texts insisting that the subject peoples are indeed like slaves. Moreover, the most important alternative to the paradigm of mastery is not parental authority, as it is in discourse about the principate, but the model of patron or benefactor. Paternal (and maternal) metaphors do have a place in the language of empire, but it is not until relatively late – in the changed world of the fourth and fifth centuries CE – that they play a significant role. Gendered language is also noticeably absent. Gender relations do not supply a vocabulary of power and subjection in the same way as slavery and clientage. Their significance for the language of imperialism is both more subtle and less systematic.¹⁵

Remarkably little attention has been given to these tropes for the relationship between centre and periphery – or indeed to the broader language of empire (as John Richardson has noted in his

¹³ For husbands and wives see e.g. Livy 34.7.12–13 and Joshel and Murnaghan 1998; for emperors and subjects, see Roller 2001 ch. 4.

¹⁴ Roller 2001 ch. 4. ¹⁵ See e.g. pp. 173–4 on Plin. *Pan.* 30–2.

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recent monograph on the semantics of *imperium* and *provincia*).¹⁶ This is in striking contrast to the extensive work on the visual tropes used to represent the condition of the subject peoples in Roman art. Images of foreign men, women and children, often portrayed as dejected captives, and female personifications of peoples, lands and provinces are common in the art of the Roman empire.¹⁷ Particularly significant examples are the relief sculptures of the peoples (*ethnē*) and islands of the empire in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias (possibly based on the representations in the lost Augustan *porticus ad nationes* in Rome), the ‘provinces’ coin series of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius and the images of peoples that ringed the interior of the temple of the Divine Hadrian (Hadrianeum).¹⁸ The iconography of empire draws on a range of visual tropes to represent the condition of the subject peoples. Images of enslavement – chained and dejected captives – are widespread and persistent, particularly in representations of barbarian figures.¹⁹ The use of female figures to personify foreign peoples and lands implicitly exploits the gender code to subordinate the periphery (particularly when the female personifications are juxtaposed with male Roman figures, as for example in the famous reliefs illustrating the conquest of Britannia by Claudius and Armenia by Nero in the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias).²⁰ A few images and monuments seem to use images of foreign children to offer a different, more paternalistic, vision of Roman rule.²¹

¹⁶ Richardson 2008 p. 5, by no means the last word on ‘the language of empire’.

¹⁷ See especially Ramsby and Severy-Hoven 2007 and Kuttner 1995 on the Augustan era, Ferris 2000 on representations of barbarians, Parisi Presicce 1999, Kuttner 1995 ch. 3 and Smith 1988 pp. 70–7 on the trope of personification, Cody 2003 and Méthy 1992 on representations of the provinces on the coinage and Östenberg 2009 ch. 4 and Beard 2007 ch. 5 on the iconography of the triumph.

¹⁸ Sebasteion: Smith 1988. ‘Provinces’ series: Toynbee 1934. Hadrianeum: Hughes 2009 and Sapelli 1999.

¹⁹ See especially de Souza 2011 and Bradley 2004 for images of captives and cf. Smith 1988 on allusions to this ‘captive iconography’ in the sculpture groups of the Sebasteion and Hadrianeum.

²⁰ Ramsby and Severy-Hoven 2007, Dillon 2006, Rodgers 2003 and Ferris 2000 (esp. 55–60 and 165–8).

²¹ See in general Uzzi 2005 chs. 6–9 and also Kleiner and Buxton 2008, Kuttner 1995 pp. 100–7 and Rose 1990 on the two (or three) foreign children in the procession scenes on the precinct wall of the Ara Pacis, Kuttner 1995 on the Boscoreale cups and Currie 1996 on the arch of Trajan at Beneventum.

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The categories and tropes that constitute the textual counterpart to this iconography of empire have received far less attention. Franz Christ's 1938 dissertation on representations of world rule remains a useful compendium of relevant passages in Latin literature, but it is descriptive rather than interpretative and does not address the metaphors studied here.²² More promising is a recent monograph by Joel Allen which argues that the different roles played by foreign hostages at Rome (including guest, trophy, son, student and sexual object) could be seen as epitomising the condition of the foreign peoples from whom they came. But Allen's study is problematic in some respects and, in any case, its real focus is on the peoples on the periphery of the empire, not the provincialised population.²³ The most significant forerunner to my study is the long-running debate about the relevance of patronage to Roman conceptions of empire. This was sparked by Ernst Badian's claim that the forms taken by Roman imperialism in the Middle Republic were shaped by the domestic practice of *clientela*.²⁴ But this has been a narrow and increasingly misguided discussion. It has obscured the fact that patronage is at best one of several competing

²² Christ 1938.

²³ Allen 2006. Allen must be right that the presence of hostages and other foreign youths in the city of Rome was an important visible reminder of the dependent status of peoples and kingdoms on the periphery of the empire, and that the position of those hostages might be seen as paradigmatic of the condition of the peoples that sent them. This is particularly relevant for the Republican period, when many allied and subject communities sent hostages to Rome. But Allen's argument becomes much more problematic when it comes to the Principate, as it conflates the case of children who came to Rome from the kingdoms and tribes on the edges of the empire either as hostages or students (a slippage that is already problematic, but potentially productive) with that of young nobles from Britain and Gaul being educated in leading cities in their own provinces (pp. 149–50, 163–4), Germans from beyond the frontier who were held as slaves or hostages in the Gallic provinces (pp. 121, 150), and even senatorial youths who were treated as hostages by emperors to ensure the loyalty of their fathers during their time as governors in the provinces (pp. 46–9). The questions of what peoples the 'hostages' represent, where they are on display, and who they are viewed by become thoroughly confused. I am also unconvinced by Allen's conclusion that there was a shift in Roman attitudes to the periphery between the reigns of Augustus and Trajan, from 'welcoming condescension' to 'stampeding military ambition' (p. 252), a conclusion which depends on a reductive dichotomy between 'coerced' and 'voluntary' hostages (these are really two poles of a spectrum) and which is in any case belied by Augustus' campaigns of conquest and Hadrian's relative restraint.

²⁴ Dmitriev 2010 pp. 437–44, Eilers 2002 pp. 186–9, Ferrary 1997b pp. 113–7, Rich 1989, Gruen 1984 pp. 172–84, Lintott 1981b pp. 61–2, Harris 1979 p. 135 n. 2, Bleicken 1964 and Badian 1958. See further pp. 177–8.

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paradigms for Rome's imperial project. The important question is not whether Romans considered their foreign dependants to be in a condition of clientage, but rather how clientage worked as one of several competing models for submission to Rome.

Scope

This study focuses almost exclusively on texts written in Latin because its goal is to examine how the Roman elite that governed the provinces envisaged their shared imperial project. This elite, centred geographically on the city of Rome and socially on the senatorial and equestrian orders and the imperial household, supplied the provincial governors and their staff, the fiscal officials and the legionary and detachment commanders who wielded Roman power in the provinces. Its members were also the principal consumers, the patrons and often the producers of most surviving Latin literature in my period. Indeed many of the texts discussed in this book were written by men of senatorial or equestrian rank who also held office in Rome or the provinces.

Similar questions could be asked about the paradigms that structure the representation of Roman rule in Greek literature. But most Greek texts emerge from contexts that are politically and culturally quite different from those discussed here, and so necessarily stand in a different relationship to Roman power. When one Hellenised Jew (Philo) praises Augustus for not just loosening but undoing the chains that fettered the world and freeing all cities from slavery, while another (Josephus) seeks to convince his countrymen of the necessity of submitting to Rome on the basis that all the most powerful nations of the world have resigned themselves to enslavement by Rome,²⁵ when Plutarch urges the leaders of Greek

²⁵ Philo: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τὰ δεσμά, οἷς κατέζευκτο καὶ ἐπεπίεστο ἡ οἰκουμένη, παραλύσας, οὐ μόνον ἀνεῖς' ... οὗτος ὁ τὰς πόλεις ἀπάσας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν ἐξελόμενος (*Leg.* 145–7; εἰς ἐλευθερίαν ἐξελέσθαι is the legal term for freeing a slave who has been wrongly enslaved). In the speech that Josephus attributes to the Jewish king Agrippa II (whose arguments are echoed in a speech in Josephus' own voice at 5.362–419), Agrippa reminds his fellow Jews that the Athenians are slaves to the Romans (δουλεύουσιν Ῥωμαίοις, *Joseph. BJ* 2.358), the Spartans tolerate the same masters (ἀγαπῶσιν τοὺς αὐτοὺς δεσπότης, 359), the Spanish too have been enslaved (καὶ τούτους ἐδουλώσαντο Ῥωμαῖοι, 375), as have the Germans (δουλεύουσιν, 377), the Britons (ἐδουλώσαντο Ῥωμαῖοι, 378) and even Parthia,

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cities to be obedient to their Roman rulers, but not so obsequious as to invite chains on their neck besides those already on their feet and force their rulers ‘to be masters more than they want’,²⁶ or when one second-century *rhetor* (Dio Chrysostom) dismisses the rivalries between Greek cities as the squabbling of fellow slaves, while another (Aelius Aristides) insists that the Romans are the first imperial power to treat their subjects as free men²⁷ – in all these cases, empire is being envisaged from the perspective of the subject. The question for these writers is whether or not they are slaves. This book is concerned with those who were in a position to ask themselves whether they were masters. It is true that some Greek writers were members of the empire’s equestrian and senatorial elite and held high office. But even they were forced by the very act of writing in Greek to negotiate a more complicated relationship to ‘Roman’ power and ‘Roman’ culture. There is much to be said about their representations of empire, but it needs to be set in a different frame, one which pays due attention to their triangulation of their own position in relation to the ruling power and its subjects. In any case, the topic of Greek perspectives on the empire has received considerable attention in recent years.²⁸ This book focuses on the representation of empire by a self-professed imperial elite.

There are two exceptions to the exclusion of Greek texts. The third-century historian Cassius Dio is included because his status as senator and counsellor of several emperors locates him at the centre of Roman power, because his representation of Roman rule as enslavement marks a significant break from earlier Greek historiography and reflects the influence of the Latin tradition, and because his date makes him an invaluable perspective on conceptions of empire

which endures slavery under the pretext of peace (ἐν εἰρήνης προφάσει δουλεύουσιν, 379). Only the Jews disdain to be Rome’s slaves (ἀδοξεῖτε δουλεύειν, 361). See further Lavan 2007.

²⁶ μηδὲ τοῦ σκέλους δεδεμένου προσυποβάλλειν καὶ τὸν τράχηλον ... ἀναγκάζουσιν ἑαυτῶν μᾶλλον ἢ βούλονται δεσπότης εἶναι τοὺς ἡγουμένους (*Plut. Prae. ger. reip.* 814F).

²⁷ Dio Chrysostom: ἔστι γὰρ ὁμοδούλων πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐριζόντων περὶ δόξης καὶ πρωτεῖων (*Or.* 34.51). Aelius Aristides: μόνοι γὰρ τῶν πώποτε ἐλευθέρων ἄρχετε (*Or.* 26.36). See further p. 211.

²⁸ Among the most significant works are Yarrow 2006, Goldhill 2001, Whitmarsh 2001, Swain 1996, Nutton 1978, Forte 1972 and Bowie 1970.

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at the very end of my period.²⁹ The second exception is the corpus of letters written by emperors and provincial governors to the cities of the East, which is discussed in Chapter 6. Even these texts reveal that Greek accounts of empire necessarily draw on a different cultural repertoire when it comes to conceptualising and representing relations of power.³⁰ For example, Greek has no direct equivalent for the Roman idea of *clientela*. The introduction of the loan word *πάτρων* into Greek civic discourse as Roman patronage relations expanded into the Greek East shows that the Roman *patronus* was seen as something different from the traditional Greek figure of the civic benefactor (εὐεργέτης).³¹ Conversely, there is no clear Latin equivalent for the ‘saviour and benefactor’ (σωτήρ καὶ εὐεργέτης), a common trope of civic discourse and Hellenistic diplomacy and one that was applied to Rome in the Republican period,³² or for the tyrant city (πόλις τύραννος), which played an important role in earlier Greek discourse about empire.³³

Within the domain of Latin literature, the analysis ranges widely. This is a subject that demands a broad, cultural approach. Representations of Rome as a masterly or patronal power are too widespread to be reduced to the conventions of particular genres or – even more narrowly – to intertextual relationships between individual texts.³⁴ These tropes are drawn from a distinctly Roman

²⁹ See further pp. 106–7.

³⁰ See Gotter 2008 for an attempt to articulate some of the differences between Athenian and Republican Roman discourses of power.

³¹ On the introduction of *πάτρων*, *πατρωνεία*, and *πατρωνεύειν* into Greek inscriptions and the different connotations of Roman patronage and Greek euergetism, see Eilers 2002 ch. 5, Ferrary 1997a and Ferrary 1997b. On the ideals of euergetism, see further Gauthier 1985.

³² See e.g. the dedication erected by the city of Laodicea on the Capitol honouring τὸν δῆμον Ῥωμαίων γεγονότα ἑαυτῷ σωτήρα καὶ εὐεργέτην, rendered *populum Romanum benefici ergo* in Latin (*ILLRP* 177 = *ILS* 33), and numerous civic decrees from e.g. Delphi (*SIG³* 702, 6–7), Magnetum (*SIG³* 685, 22), Athens (*SIG³* 704F, 6 and *SIG³* 717, 15), Ephesus (*SIG³* 742, 2) and the Amphycyonic League (*SIG³* 704H, 27). See further Erskine 1994, Ferrary 1988 pp. 124–32, Mellor 1975 pp. 113–14 and Robert 1969.

³³ Thuc. 1.222.3, 1.124.3, 2.63.2; Ar. *Eq.* 1111–14; Pl. *Resp.* 545c, 576c, *Leg.* 711a; Plut. *Per.* 12.2; Lucian *Par.* 48.6. See Tamiolaki 2010 pp. 107–10, Raaflaub 2004 pp. 324 n. 82 and 141–3, Raaflaub 2003, Tuplin 1985, Raaflaub 1979, Schuller 1978, Hunter 1973/4 and de Romilly 1963.

³⁴ This is not to deny the existence – or the significance – of such intertextuality. See e.g. p. 92 on Verg. *Aen.* 1.281–5 (Jupiter’s promise of Roman mastery) and Hom. *Il.* 6.448–65, p. 110 on Dio’s use of *δουλοῦν* and Thucydides, and p. 201 on Livy 34.58.11